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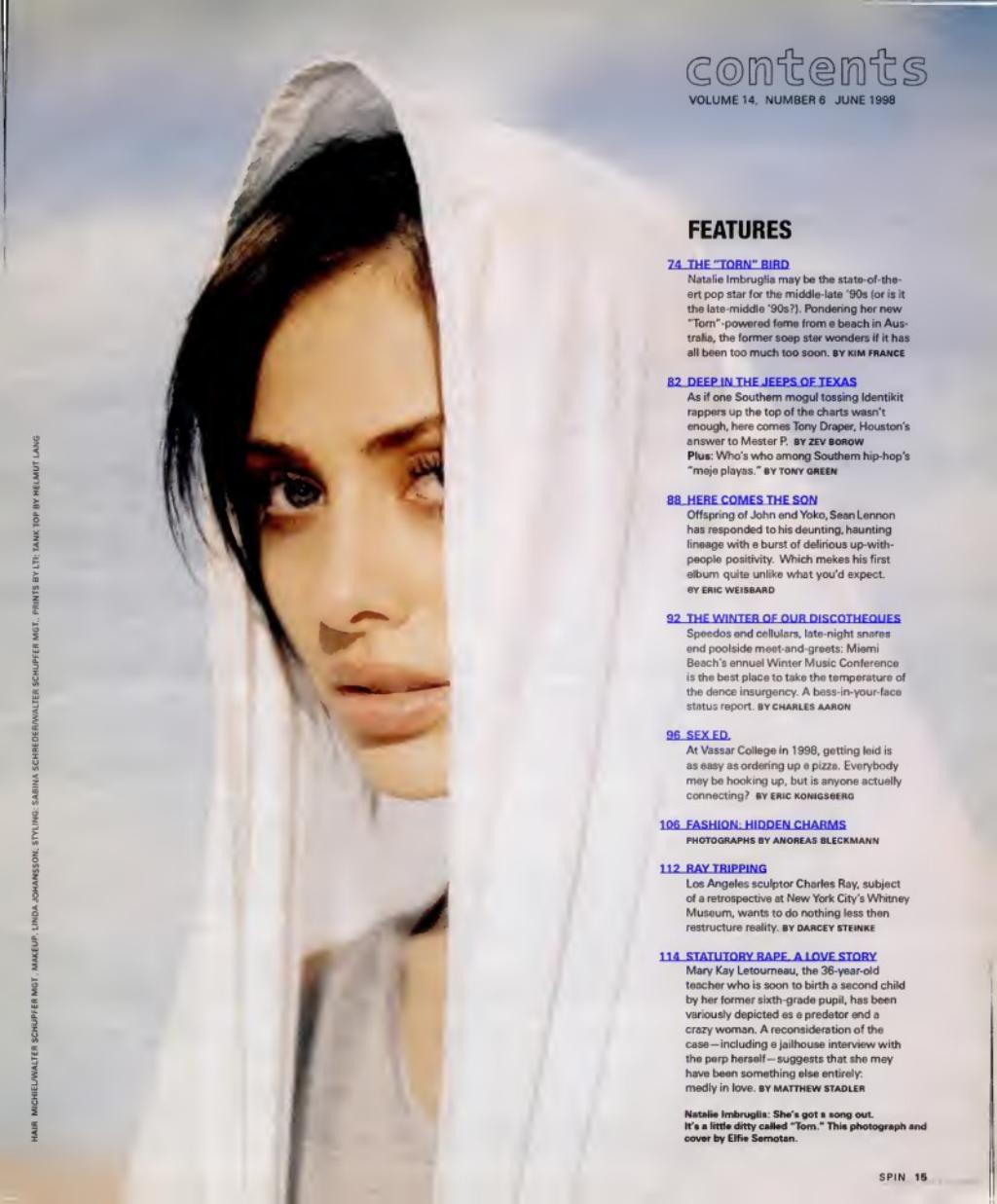
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Natalie Imbruglia: She's got a song out. It's a little ditty called "Tom." This photograph and cover by Elie Semotan.

THE BEST BANDS

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27

5

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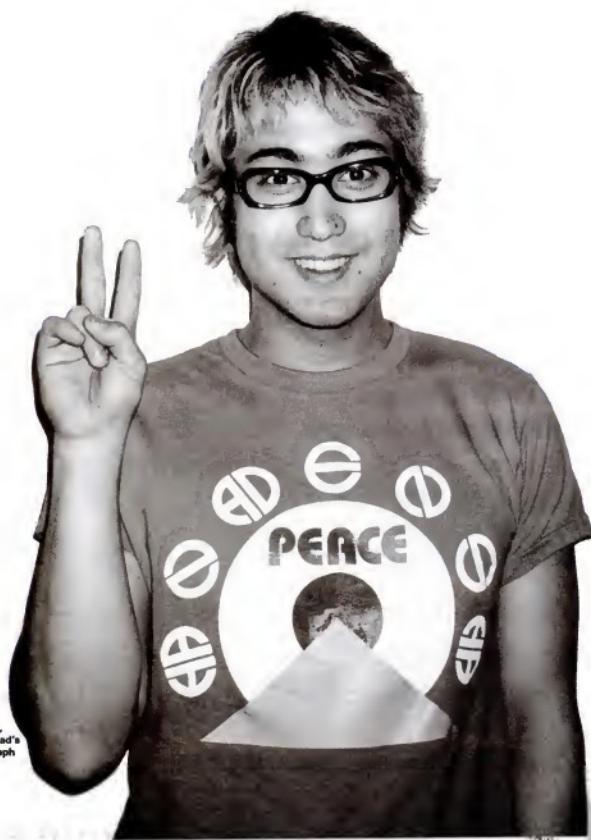
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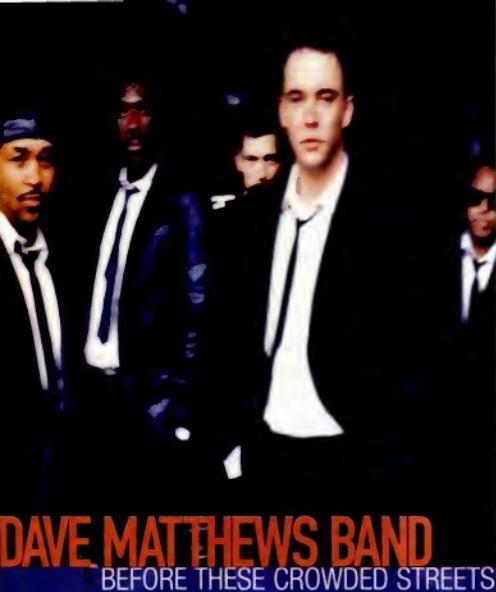
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As a former New York City high-school philosophy teacher **Matthew Stadler** has a different take on the Mary Kay Letourneau scandal ("Statutory Rape, a Love Story"). "There have been many contexts over the course of history where her relationship would have had support." But, as Stadler notes, "Let's face it: She's not Plato in the Arcadian garden." Stadler is the books editor at the Seattle weekly *The Stranger*. His novel, *Allan Stein*, will be published by Grove next winter.



"He has a lot of trippy ideas," *Spin* Contributing Editor **Darcey Steinke** says of sculptor Charles Ray, whose arresting work she writes about in "Ray Tripping." "But he tries to distance himself from what he calls 'white-bourgeois trippy talk.' He doesn't want to be misunderstood as whacked-out and cosmic." Steinke recently coedited *Foolish Noise: The New Testament Revisited* (Little, Brown) with Rick Moody, and her latest novel, *Jesus Saves* (Atlantic Monthly), is out now.



The biggest challenge facing **Elie Semotan**, who photographed this month's Natalie Imbruglia cover story, "The Torn Bird," was re-creating a beach in the middle of a New York City studio. "We had something like a half ton of sand delivered—which is not as much as you would think," says Semotan, "so we had to get a ton more delivered. But it was worth it; Natalie looked right at home." Semotan also shoots for French *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *i-D*, and *Interview*.



Photographer **Andreas Bleckmann** found inspiration for this month's fashion spread, "Hidden Charms," right outside his window. "Outside my apartment in London there was a girl I would see," says Bleckmann. "She had this awkward way of lighting a cigarette. So I looked down at her hands and saw this fake rubber hand with nail polish on it. It was really eerie." Bleckmann, who also shoots for the *Face* and *British Vogue*, wants everyone to know that the guy with the big ears in the shoot is his assistant.



As Eric Konigsberg learned while writing this month's story about the sex lives of Vassar undergrads ("Sex Ed"), no greater peril exists for the professional journalist than getting sucked into a story—in this case, literally. "I was invited to come back to the campus to witness the last orgy of the term," Konigsberg says, "but I couldn't fit it into my hectic schedule." A contributing editor for *New York* magazine, Konigsberg is still kicking himself.



SEMITAN: ALEXANDER DRYER

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THE OFFICIAL END OF CONVERSATION.

# Your *South Park* cover is utterly disgusting—which is why I had to have it! — Stephen L. Roldan



The three pre-teenaged创造者 (writers) Trey Parker and Matt Stone, and the show's two main characters, Kyle and Eric, are shown here in their original forms, as they appeared in the cartoon's first season. The characters have since undergone several changes.



## Cheesy Poofs

*South Park* on the cover of *Spin* [March?] Come on, those two pothead morons [Trey Parker and Matt Stone] couldn't even come up with an original thought if it bit them on the ass (oops—watch them use that lame old joke in an upcoming episode). Sally Struthers is fat—how hilarious! Talking turds—stop it, you're killing me! There is absolutely nothing on *South Park* that hasn't been seen on *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butt-head*, or *Ren & Stimpy*—end all those show did it better. *Nick Dilio*, Chicago, Illinois

In the tradition of the original *Ren & Stimpy*, *South Park* pushes the envelope and consistently hits its mark. *Maria Wolf*, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Your *South Park* cover is utterly disgusting—which is why I had to have it! *Stephen Lee Roldan*, Aiea, Hawaii



Is it really necessary to psychoanalyze a cartoon? Some things are meant to be taken at face value—like perverted, xenophobic, sadistic, codependent, maladjusted, foul-mouthed, bigoted, preadolescent fecophiles. Perhaps *Spin*'s editors need a little couch time of their own. *Bob Pousman*, Houston, Texas

*South Park* is by no means "the most edgy and eccentric show on television." The only shocking things about it are the lack of wit and the fact that mainstream culture is actually buying into its contrived weirdness. Chris Norris is absolutely right in pointing out that a bunch of fart jokes will never pose a threat to the social satire that takes place in Springfield every week. *Lee Gerber*, via Internet

Chris Norris calls *South Park* "quaintly animated," but the first few unfunny seasons of *The Simpsons* were shod-

dily scribbled, too. And in just one season, the industry impact of *South Park* is comparable to what it took *The Simpsons* three years to accomplish. America needs a good non-p.c. show like *South Park*, which mocks racism and social ignorance, kicks seriousness in the butt, and gives people an alternative to worthless television like *Home Improvement* and *The Drew Carey Show*. *Chad Weaver*, Spokane, Washington

## Crucifixion Complex

In response to your most unnecessary article on Mötley Crüe ("Shout at the Bouncer," March), I would like to say thank you to Kurt Cobain, Eddie Vedder, Perry Farrell, Hole, Sonic Youth, and the Breeders. In the early '90s, these guys/girls not only ridged radio and MTV of embarrassing bands like the Crüe, they also put them to shame. Wake up, boys—the big-shot, big-money, bimbo, racist, misogynistic days of rock are over. *Sally Everest*, New York, New York

I am totally pissed by the casually condescending manner in which you deal with what is certainly the greatest, most influential band of the last quarter century. The entire article is permeated by sarcasm and mockery which I found to be offensive and cruel. Modern music owes a serious debt to the Crüe's ultimate album, *Theater of Pain*. *Mark J. Kozel*, Alpine, Texas

News flesh to Nikki Sixx and Tommy Lee: The reason your last album was a bomb had nothing to do with a lack of

record label support and everything to do with the fact that it blows—big time. *Larry Clifton*, Elkton, Maryland

To even print remarks by Mötley Crüe calling Elektra Entertainment CEO Sylvia Rhone a "cunt," "anti-man," and a "racist" who "doesn't understand [their] music" is outrageous. Ms. Rhone's contribution to the music industry has been historic. She has seen phenomenal success with not only rock but also alternative, pop, R&B, and hip-hop artists. No disrespect or petty name-calling from some failing and forgotten rock band can change that. Mötley Crüe are over. *Sylvia Rhone*, Bronx, New York

How dare Tommy Lee ridicule a real rock legend like Paul Stanley? If not for pioneers like Kiss, there would be no Mötley Crüe.

*Darrell W. Sanders*, Jr., Detroit, Michigan

Anyone who's offended that Nikki Sixx called a security guard "nigger" needs to realize Sixx once wrote, "Martin Luther King brought the truth / The color of our blood's the same." If the bouncer "punched a girl in the face," then who cares what anyone called him? If y'all went to profile a politically correct band, go talk to R.E.M. *Todd Baxter*, Clinton, Mississippi

How great to hear that Mötley Crüe consider themselves poised for a comeback. After all, who would want to live in a country in which entertainers don't

## SPINONLINE

**SPINtastic Imbruglia's imbroglios and Tori trivias:** Read our cover story on Australian songstress Natalie Imbruglia, then log onto SPINonline May 15 for a lit of Natalie's favorite make-out tunes. And after inhaling our review of Tori Amos's new joint *From the Choirgirl Hotel*, check in on May 22 for our Tori Amos Online Extravaganza and a chance to win the disc and other little pink things.

**Chain Reaction** Jesus and Mary Chain just released *Munki*, their first album in four years. In an L.A. interview, frontman Peter says the band's insatiable appetite for Ecstasy, the Velvet Underground, and Mazzy Star's *Heave Sandow*. Log on May 12 for the full 411.

**The Phatboy Sings** "Stupid dance music, that's what I do," says Norman Cook (a.k.a. Fatboy Slim) in a recent SPINonline interview. Log on May 29 and

find out how he "knocked Celina Dion out of the water."

**The SPINdex Poll** If you were given the chance to put anyone you want on the cover of *Spin*, who would it be? E-mail your answer to SPINtastic@iol.com.

**The Sound-Off** Our request for original ways to kill *South Park*'s hapless young Kenny was met with a deluge of bloody responses—everything from

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Hanson's head-explosions voices to Mike Tyson's cannibalistic tendencies. Carman, however, was the show's most popular voter: *SPINdix@aol.com* imagined Kenny's visit to a Hanson concert: "Their singing is sooo bad that Kenny kills himself by jumping into Carman's Cheesy Poofs, where he is then eaten."

**Having a bad hair decade:** Jesus and Mary Chain's Jim Reid, left, and Willam Reid.





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degrade their female bosses, don't drink to excess (or talk about the "good of days" when they did), and don't ask women to expose themselves. I stopped listening to Motley Crue when I grew up, and I think that's why America stopped listening, too.

**Jim Withington**  
Marengo, Illinois

### The Lady Is a Trump

Oh great—I was just dying to read about Ivanka Trump ("Ivanka!" March). As if Gwen Stefani isn't vacant enough,

### Pretty Hate Machine: The Angriest Twentysomething

Okay, let's get ready to ramble: Once upon a time, only groundbreaking career artists like B.E.M., Public Enemy, and Nirvana were deemed worthy of the hallowed cover of *Spin*. Now any *Denim* rejects not even worth a muttfunkin' five minutes of fame, let alone 15, are sure to be covered in *Spin* slobber as soon as they push those platinum sugar titts under your ferret-like noses. But at least you once pimped music, although it's questionable whether that term applies to Fiona "Touch Me I'm Sick" Apple (Who's next: Natalie "Makes Fiona Seem Like Billie Holiday by Comparison" Imbruglia?). And now you're lowering those brown noses all the way down to...the boob tube? Mere implants at that: Somewhere between the 2-D anatomical wonderland of *South Park* and the nostalgic ribbling of *Chris* "You're Beginning to Bore Us" Norria you will find the Over-in-Two-Sessions Zone.

*South Park's* ultra-andro boy's-locker-room ball-sweat humor is a prepackaged as a Leonardo DiCaprio rotation device, and as exciting as another *Mortal Kombat* sequel. Thank you, Mr. Norris, for offering this wonderfully obvious inflection that *The Simpsons* has more plot structures and socio-anthropological depth. Now pull your disk out of the well socket for a sec and let me plop you in to some logic. At best, *South Park* represents like a little-bang-a-junior-high—wet willies, towel-snapping, fart jokes. How, yeah, fneeeeew! Post *Beavis and Butt-head*, an animated Seven-Words-You-Can-Say-on-TV show was only a matter of time. The nightmare of it all is that the real second season will find Americans looking for something to make their couch potatoes a bit more *au gratin*: new flavor, more zing, and a second helping of beefcake. Congratulations, *Spin*: You sold your soul for a piece of talking poo.

Hidey-ho,

**Tony Stockton**  
Roanoke, Virginia

you guys managed to find someone worse—and photograph her like she belongs in a kiddie pom mag. Just what the world needs: another pouty rich girl saying she's not (gasp) a snob!

**Jessica Myers**  
Newark, Ohio

### Should He Stay or Should He Go?

Say it ain't so that Sean Landers could be fired [Genius Lessons, March]! So what if he's a pathetic loser? Ninety percent of the people who read this magazine are pathetic losers. What the hell am I gonna read when I'm taking a crap? **Janine Butler**  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

I've always worried that Sean Landers is a complete fabrication made up by some schmuck at Spin who thought it would be "marketable" to have a loathing anti-hero for the Gen X-ers. You know, the "your shit is my food" philosophy. Well, in any case, you managed to help me keep my sanity whenever I remember that I am nowhere near as pissed off as you. So, if you are real, Sean, I respect you. **Bert Bacchus**  
Greenville, South Carolina

I was desperately hoping to see something take the place of Sean Landers's self-acclaimed Genius Lessons in the March issue. But like a bad hemorrhoid that keeps resurfacing, his loathsome column was staring me dead in the face. My generation may be a bunch of self-absorbed assholes, but at least we respect ourselves enough not to quit our jobs and then plead for them back. Sean, you have lost both my respect and my vote of confidence. You're fired! **John Vandrasits**  
Garden City Park, New York

I was surprised to find out so many people hate Sean's column. Can no one relate to real life? Are we just so stuck in our mundane rutualistic lives that, when someone offers us even the slightest ray of hope to brighten our days, we cruelly turn our haughty backs to it? For the love of God, give the man his job back and give him a raise!

**J.M.B.**  
Bristol, Pennsylvania

Whatever happened to Sean Landers? I used to look forward to Genius Lessons and I used to think he was very funny. However, he's just been depressing and mean-spirited lately. Is he jealous of *Spin's* readers because he's going through some sort of midlife crisis—or is he just an asshole?

**Rebecca Potter**  
Lincoln, Nebraska



Save our schools: These Wisconsin future Mensa members love Sean Landers.

My friend was very dismayed when she found out that Sean is married. She considered him a kindred spirit—and it is hard to find someone as mutually misanthropic as she is (she there goes his chance for a new bزا).

**Gina Boboltzky**  
Kew Gardens, New York

I vote in favor of Sean Landers's no-talent ass leaving. Tony Stockton can fill the upcoming opening for venomous tirdness this time on the back page.

**Adam Behrens**  
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Let's see, Sean Landers writes an offensive column and people get upset about it. So he writes another offensive column. I read *Spin* to get info on the music I listen to—not to be repeatedly insulted. He may call it humor, but I cannot remember any instance in which I found one of Sean's rantings actually funny. I say get rid of the guy.

**Daniel Kachur**  
Charlottesville, Virginia

### Bad Religion

I am not overly conservative, but I find it appalling you would use religious

themes to promote clothes ("What Would Jesus Do?" Fashion, March). Would a similar thing have been done with a Jewish or an Islamic theme? In this very diverse world, we have a responsibility to be considerate of each other's beliefs.

**Jeremy Kergel**  
Scotia, New York

What would Jesus do? He wouldn't appear in *Spin*, that's for sure.

**Jon Herai**  
Bowling Green, Ohio

Will someone please explain to me what could possibly be attractive about a man lying passed out in the street, bleeding from what appears to be a drug overdose? I am not offended in the least by your Jesus look-alike, but I find it disturbing you would portray an addict as fashionable and glamorous, regardless of what he's wearing.

**Michelle Rommrich**  
Athens, Georgia

Is it just me, or does your fashion glorify glamorize crunk, right after Mark Schone's extensive report on the

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problem? Is Jesus dying for our sins, or from our drugs?  
*Brian Sparks  
San Jose, California*

**Tad's Best Friend**

Thumbs-up for giving Tad Friend a column. Although I dig the take-no-prisoners approach of his first piece ("Notes on the Death of the Celebrity Profile," Content Provider, March), I can't help but think, "Whoa, big guy it's only celebrity profile!" Anyways who cracks a *Vanity Fair* cover piece expecting something besides cotton candy deserves whatever bad writing they get. Nonetheless, I'm already peeing around the newstand awaiting Friend's next installment.  
*Scott Dickerheets  
Henderson, Nevada*

**Porn Again**

Steve Erickson's "Of Human Blondage" [March] is dead-on: America's fixation with the buxom, blond girl-next-door has never ceased. Jenna Jameson, sadly, is in a dead-end art form. She's an attractive young woman with an innate comic ability who will never get a chance because of the squareheads who run the entertainment industry.  
*Edward Every  
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

Comparing Sharon Stone and Cameron Diaz to a porn actress? Give me a break. I work in the business myself, and understand Jenna Jameson's problem. But Marilyn Monroe would hardly have had oral sex for the world to see. Steve Erickson obviously just wanted an excuse to ask Jameson out.  
*Holly Gardner  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

Whereda you unearth the caveman known as Steve Erickson? He praises a porn star [Jenna Jameson] and knocks actresses such as Jessica Lange and Michelle Pfeiffer for having loftier artistic ambitions. I wanted to strangle him when he lauded Jameson as a refreshing throwback to when women were silent sex objects. How could Erickson refer to Jameson as an "existential hero." For what? Sucking dick?  
*Emily Barracaro  
Hamilton, New Jersey*

**Poll Taxed**

I always thought Sean Landers was just being pessimistic when he spoke of the geeky, trendily disgusting lame Gen X-ers who are the alleged readers of *Spin*—until the 1997 "Readers Poll" results were published [March]. My heart sank to read the rankings of Beck and Fiona Apple—how patheti-

cally mainstream can you get? I can't believe those same people could see clearly enough to elect the Spice Girls and Hanson as the year's worst. Though *Spin* is often cutting-edge, I see that its readers are not.  
*Suzi Reul  
Louisville, Kentucky*

Whatever happened to those sarcastic comments that accompanied the "Readers Poll" results? I miss being mocked by your editors!  
*Misty Nall  
Owensboro, Kentucky*

I know I am not alone in wondering how the "Sex God or Goddess" category is relevant to your poll. It has nothing to do with music, and belittles the talent of Gavin Rossdale—the winner—and Bush as a whole.  
*Karri Haza  
Scranton, Pennsylvania*

**Lost in Translation**

Andrew Beaujon shows us once again that Americans "don't know Jacques" about French music ("Music as a Second Language," March). The list of errors and generalizations in his thankfully short article are endless. For one thing, Indochine's biggest hit was "Troisème Sexe," not "L'Avanturier," and Bob Morane (not "Moran") is not an "oddly renamed" Indiana Jones but a real adventure-novel hero. *Oh là, ça va mal!* And by the way, if more Americans were open enough to other cultures as to sing a few songs in French, wouldn't they have had accents too?  
*Mathieu Thomas  
Montreal, Canada*

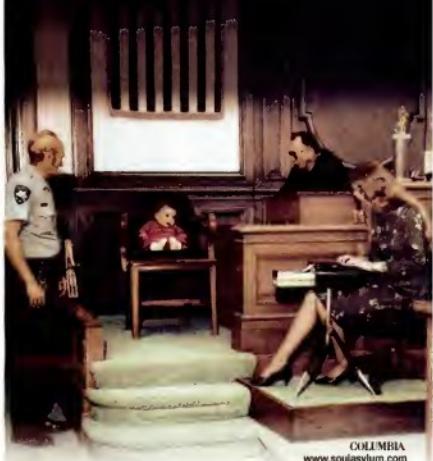
**Corrections**

In "The Diner's Club" (April 1998), we erroneously reported that R. Kelly wrote and produced Mary J. Blige's "Seven Days," when, in fact, the writer/producer is Malik Pendleton.

In "The Great White Way" (April 1998), we reported that Doctor Dream Records went out of business two years ago, when the label has actually been in business continuously for the past 12 years.

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## Smooth Operator

The stylin' kitsch of Dimitri From Paris

The name may be Dimitri From Paris, but France's latest winsome techno export says he used to sweat being linked with such national treasures as cheesy pop lifer Johnny Hallyday. "Until now, it wasn't cool at all to be French and play music," the swivel-eyed DJ says. "We used to hide behind foreign names, because we didn't want people to consider us French. So I decided, let's stop hiding behind these names. And suddenly, everybody's interested." On his debut, the lounge-flavored house platter *Sacrébleu*, the DJ joins ranks with competitors Air, Daft Punk, and DJ Cam as a purveyor of trendily kitschy bass lines and goofy faux-sentiment. But where those acts project American pop through a Continental lens, Dimitri turns the camera around. "I was always into the very French people who are perceived by American culture—Maurice Chevalier, the French bermuda-set *Cantinflas*—and I wanted to mix all those clichés together." The result is an adoringly constructed bit of sunlit fluff that builds deep, intelligent grooves from the stylized ephemera of '60s and '70s swinger culture. Indeed, Dimitri is something of a stylephile himself. A 15-year vet of the turntables, he made his name writing runway themes for such très haute lines as Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel, and Gaultier. But don't expect him to be a guidepost for sartorially challenged clubgoers. "Right now, I'm wearing a pair of Nikes and Dickies pants," he says. "I probably look like a gas-station worker." JEFFREY ROTTEN

For more on Dimitri From Paris, log on to SPINonline at keyword: Spin on AOL.



# Cherry Bombs

Good girls go to heaven;  
the Donnas go everywhere

Every high school has at least a few of them: the way-cool girls who cut gym, smoke in the parking lot, end eventually take up permanent residence in detention hall. At California's Palo Alto High, the bad girls were the Donnas, but instead of just bitching about how much school sucked, they wrote songs about it. Now, fresh out of school, sporting tight, matching T-shirts and Joan Jett-type swagger, the foursome dispense their own brand of good-time cavegirl feminism. On their loud and proud American *Teenage Rock 'n' Roll Machine*, the group—vocalist Donna A., 18, guitarist Donna R., 18, bassist Donna F., 19, and drummer Donna C., 19—augment their buoyant pop-metal riffs with a flurry of “gonnas,” “wannas,” and “gimmes.” Their manifesto: curfew + classes = bad; action + boys = good. In short, don’t look for them on the Lilith Tour.

“We’re not very girlie, to tell the truth,” says Donna R. What they lack in daintiness, though, they’ve made up in precociousness. Hastily assembled six years ago for a school talent show (“People were just like, ‘What the hell is going on?’” she says), the band released a few singles and a self-titled debut album before being picked up last year by Berkeley, California’s famed Lookout! label (*Green Day, Operation Ivy*). The Donnas claim they actually pulled good grades in school despite skipping out on most of it, and even gave collegiate life a shot last fall, but decided to tour behind *Machete* instead. So how would the Donnas’ penchant for delinquency mesh with the rigors of academia? “We know how to bullshit,” Donna R. says, “so we’d probably do okay. But I’d still probably write about how much it sucked.” **TIM KENNEDY**

Definitely not apiv: from left, Donna R.,  
Donna F., Donna C., and Donna A.

## COVERAGE

### I'm Your Number One Fan!

► “I got up on the counter [of a 7-Eleven],” recounts Bill the Juky on a *South Park* fan Web site, “and pissed on the rack where Spin sits.” Those soiled magazines are an earthy testament to the Jim

Jones-ish power *South Park* auteurs Trey Parker and Matt Stone now wield: When *Spin* gave their show its March cover and seven and a half pages of editorial without first securing their official

endorsement, the mercurial animation divas took to the Internet, huffing in random-access fashions about “lies” in the issue and ordering their minions to boycott *Spin*. ► *Fans of certain screen stars*, it is assumed, will likewise follow any instructions they may be given at the XXX-treme “Adults Only” vacation, a weeklong pleasure fest

at a secluded, ocean-side Mexican resort, which will be stocked for the occasion with approximately 100 genuine American porn stars. Activities will include “autograph” sessions, “talent” contests, and clothing-optimal “sports,” as well as the shooting of several adult movies (“You May Appear”). Attendance is limited, however; a

strict 2.5-guests-to-one-porn star ratio will be maintained.

► *Appearing at a post-Grammy party*, the fan-friendly Gavin Rossdale, unaccompanied by girlfriend Gwen Stefani, posed for a “fake smooch” photo with club kid Richie Rich, whose own natural star quality that evening was enhanced only by panties, glitter, and roller





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### » Groupsies

More and more, the DJ is the object of distinctly sexual idolatry. Look for the women, or men, parked right in front, their glassy eyes focused longingly on the DJ. "Sometimes they can be like freaky zombies," says Bay Area DJ Robbie Hardikiss. But even he can fall prey to their lascivious glances, like the time he noticed one woman chacking him out. "I finished my set and I guess I was in a hyper-horny mood. I walked up end smacked a kiss on her without a word. She ended up coming to San Francisco and I developed a friendship with her. Every time I'd come home, she was sitting on a bench near my house. That was kinda freaky." British dance pioneer Paul Oakenfold says that girlfriends are DJs' best line of defense. "My girlfriend warns the girls off if they get too close."

### « Rock Critics

While the groupies ogle, another breed lurks just behind them, vainly trying to make sense of it all. Brows furrowed, notebooks out, cargo pants pockets filled with comp drink tickets, these are the rock writers. They carry a dark secret: They have no idea what "techart" is. "They just stand there and analyze the scene the whole night," Oakenfold says. "It's like, 'Relax.'"

## I'm With the DJ

The many faces of the DJ-booth crowd

With two turntables and a microphone replacing the six-string in many a suburban bedroom, DJs are suddenly getting the kind of adulation once reserved for sweaty guitar players. You can spot their followers at any club—the pack of hangers-on in front of the DJ booth, hoping to get close to the magic (or in some cases, shut it down). Who are these people? Here, four easily recognizable types get up close and personal with Philadelphia's King Britt. **GREG MILNER**

### » Trainspotters

The fastest-growing segment of DJ hangers-on, these obsessives are just waiting for the day they themselves can take to the booth. Often dressed in regulation rave-wear (striped shirts, elephant pants, shiny trainers), they acquisitively study the turntables and occasionally air-DJ-working phantom wheels of steel—much to the amusement of dancem. "They all want to know what records I'm playing," King Britt says. "I get tons of questions—it's like going to a career fair." Indeed, the trainspotter's thirst for knowledge doesn't end at the turntables. "You'll put your hands in the air," Oakenfold says, "and then they'll ask you about the timing of putting your hands in the air."

### « Undercover Cops

Somewhere nearby, looking slightly menacing, the goon squad scans the crowd for signs of chemical intake. The more shrewd give trainspotters a run for their money in terms of sartorial correctness, but keen eyes can spot the cuffs dangling from the Day-Glo. Their close proximity to the DJ may just get the better of them, however. "You gotta make that undercover cop dance," says Britt. "Once you do that, you've crossed the line."



skates. After the impromptu photo-op, the *New York Post* reported, one of Rossdale's handlers came forward to offer Rich \$100 for the photo, explaining that the singer would be "sorry in the morning that he took a kissy picture with a man who looks a little like Gwen." ▶ **Sondra London, the Don King** of the serial-killer set, who markets

the work of author/artist/autographer Denny "As Seen on Court TV" Rolling and several less-branded murderers on her Web site, has created a new area for Death Row's latest merch opportunity: teen vampire killer Rod Ferrell. Patrons of serial-killer art will be pleased to learn that the 17-year-old blood-sucker is now in the midst of devel-

oping a product line of his own. ▶ **At a time when rock stars, sports heroes, and other assorted luminaries show their gratitude to their fans via head-butts, sexual assault, and projectile salvia**, it's nice to see a performer who truly cares. To wit: *Retail Ambiance* enhancer Lisa Loeb, whose deal with shoe manufacturer Candies

Inc. has led to department-store concert that allow Loeb's fans to see her rock it live without cutting into valuable shopping time. ▶ **Oh, and speaking of cutting:** According to something called the Gay Devotees Home Page, fans of amputation (homosexual or otherwise) can be classified as either "Devotees" or "Wannabees." (Some

ecumenical souls, of course, are both.) Devotees are able-bodied admirers of "amputees, paraplegics, or whatever." Wannabees, on the other hand, feel "a sexually motivated desire to become physically disabled." It's fairly rare for a Wannabee to pursue actual amputation; those who lack the necessary level of commitment can nonetheless

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## Waxing Moonshine

Hot inebriant totem: getting wrecked the old-fashioned way

Like Willy Wonka once said: Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker. Still, neither kills brain cells nearly as efficiently as moonshine. Illegally distilled in the basements and backyards of America's most industrious bootleggers since the days before Prohibition, moonshine (varying recipes of homemade, almost pure, good ol' grain alcohol) is making a comeback in Chicago, the city it helped build and ventilate with bullet holes. Then, it was Al Capone and friends. Now, naturally, it's the city's hippest hipsters (the same vintage-wearing, Combustible Edison-listening folks sporadically accused of founding the erstwhile "cocktail nation") who are imbibing the stuff from the South Side to Wicker Park. "You can get it at

certain drinking establishments that are against letting a silly little thing like legality get in the way of a person getting completely shit-faced," explains one urbane Chicagoan (who let a silly little thing like legality get in the way of giving his name). Prices range from \$10 for a "small jug" to \$50 for "a really big-ass jug." It generally comes from the rural areas of Indiana, Michigan, or southern Illinois and is especially popular at the city's current incarnations of Capone-style speakeasies—that is, after-hours bars. "It's just a new way to get drunk, which they're always looking for in Chicago," says a 22-year-old native. "I guess people just got sick of trying to find absinthe." —ZEV BOROW

achieve virtual truncation via a service the Gay Devotes page offers: "Electronic Surgery." Send along a digital photo of yourself, specify exactly which ungainly appendage you'd like excised, and a Photoshop wizard will do the rest.

► Need an obligatory birthday gift for that kind of annoying Nirvana completist in your life who,

frankly, isn't worth breaking a saw-buck? According to the *Goldmine Price Guide to Rock'n'Roll Memorabilia*, a burlap alarm auto-graphed by Gary Smith, the electrician who found Kurt Cobain's corpse, can be purchased for the shockingly low price of \$5.

► Mary Smolen, ferociously loyal South Park acolyte and loud-

mouthing counter monkey at a Chicago area record store, announced that from now on she will be "itching out anyone who purchases a copy of Spin at [her] place of employment." Spin readers in that vicinity are hereby advised to proceed with caution when acquiring the magazine.

► A recent report on sexuality

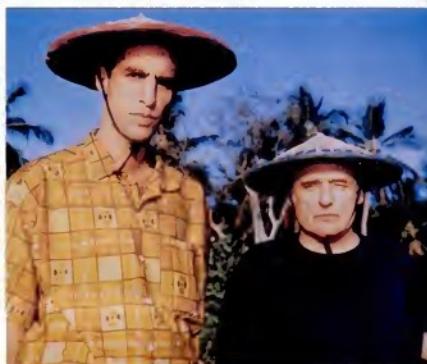
## Alt-Fishing

The movie stars, exotic locations, and impressive tackle boxes of *Fishing With John*

Will *Fishing With John*, a new six-episode TV show airing this month on the Independent Film Channel, be the sleeper that fills the post-*Seinfeld* void? It is, after all, a show about very little, featuring pasty urban white guys prone toward deadpan anecdotes and rim-shot conjecture. There's little script, though, much less a corner coffee shop: Host John Lurie takes his various cool-guy guests to tropical rivers and frozen lakes where they don the appropriately indigenous hatwear, talk sporadically, and...fish.

"You know how this thing started?" asks Lurie, leader of the Lounge Lizards, occasional actor, and, now, fishing-show auteur. "Me and Willlem [Dafoe] went fishing, and his wife would videotape us fooling around in a boat, sort of pretending different scenarios." Displaying the kind of home-video improvisation and erratic production values its origins suggest, and featuring a narrator whose parodies of Discovery Channel over dramatization oscillate from thuddingly obvious to gleefully absurd, *Fishing With John* is part talk show, part nature show, and part late-night TV sketch. Uneventful, though hilarious, it's a completely unique television-viewing experience. Where else will you see Matt Dillon forsaking his usual sullen heartthrobbery to engage in a pseudo-traditional Costa Rican fisherman's dance or Tom Waits, hungover and cranky, sticking a flopping red snapper down his shorts? "It was not such an easy sell. HBO wouldn't look at it," says Lurie. "It is a show about nothing." —G. BEATO

Dudes: Lurie at work and play with Dennis Hopper.



stated that male jazz fans have sex 30 percent more often than other men. Surprisingly, the University of Chicago, not Kenny G, funded the study.

► Jazz is also safer than rock-based musics. Since 1986, heavy metal/hard rock concerts may have proven themselves to be slightly more lethal than new wave/alter-

native concerts. Five ill-fated fans have died while attending the former, while only four have perished while attending the latter. Perhaps the single most lethal incident, however, did occur at a new wave concert, when three men were stabbed to death in a fight over spilled beer at an Echo and the Bunnymen concert in 1987. ■

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# Young Men in Black

For fans of Marilyn Manson, public devotion don't come easy

After a Michigan student was suspended in March for wearing a Korn T-shirt, Korn themselves threatened to sue the school district for defamation, the cap to a tumultuous year in which public schools banned everything from *South Park* apparel to backpacks. Nothing clogged schools' disciplinary files, however, quite like Satan—and, of course, his worldly emissary, Marilyn Manson. Attire can be incendiary! say concerned school administrators: I gotta be mel counter the Mansonites. As the school year winds down, we present this small tribute to the sartorial martyrs who walk proudly in our midst. —GREG MILNER

**T-shirts, naturally, lead to gunplay**  
Two teenagers shot and killed a sheriff's deputy and a highway patrolman outside Fayetteville, North Carolina, in September, prompting a curfew and a general suspicion of any youth perceived as "deviant." A few days after the killings, the principal of South View High banned students from wearing Manson T-shirts, as well as shirts bearing the likenesses of Tupac Shakur and the Wu-Tang Clan.

**Containing the dark power of fishnet stockings**  
In January, a group of Elm Grove, Wisconsin's Embrook Middle School students dressed as Manson lip-synched to a Manson song at a pep rally and were later harassed and beaten by other students. School officials suspected that the Manson fans provoked the attack by pretending to cast spells on other students, so the school moved to ban black lipstick, white makeup, fishnet stockings, "occult materials," and other items judged to be associated with Manson.<sup>1</sup>

**Black clothing, though natty, is strictly for devil worshipers**  
Concerned parents in Michigan wrote a letter to the school board accusing a gang of Manson-fan eighth-graders at Grand Blanc Middle School of harassing<sup>2</sup> sixth-graders. The letter claimed that Manson-mania may have contributed to two recent student suicides. Board member James Delaney agreed, adding that the First Amendment "does not protect devil worship in the eighth grade." Noting that the Manson clan dressed almost entirely in black (including jewelry, capes, dresses, lipstick, and satanic symbols), the parents urged the board to ban all black clothing.<sup>3</sup>



The Manson collection:  
Sporting any of these outfits  
while hexing other students  
may get you beat up.

**Heavy makeup may lead to suicide**  
Police arrested a 15-year-old Healdton, Oklahoma, student in March who barricaded himself in the principal's office and threatened suicide with a razor blade. School officials had objected to his heavy makeup, as well as to the pictures of Manson and satanic paraphernalia hung in his locker. "We have a policy that students can't put anything in their lockers," says Principal Bob Miller, "if it's distracting or disrupts the orderly flow of business."

**Accessories should not be freaky**  
At J.P. Taravella High in Coral Springs, Florida,<sup>4</sup> a devout Manson fan was detained by school officials who objected to his heavy makeup and red clown shoes, as well as the rubber chicken he toted. "Normally, if we ask a kid to change his dress," says Assistant Principal Donnell Sanders, "it's because he's going to be ridiculed [by other students]."<sup>5</sup> But Sanders decided in this case that the shoes could trip unsuspecting students, and that the chicken drew attention "to something other than class. Someone could assume that it was live or real, and it could freak someone out."

**Students must keep their inner Marilyn on the inside**  
The presence of Manson on a T-shirt often violates schools' bans on clothing that disrupts or impedes the educational process. Lonnie Nichols, the principal of Texas' Waxahachie High, has dealt with violators by making them turn their Manson shirts inside-out. How is Manson wear an educational disruption? "The rape, the sodomy, the self-mutilation, the murder," says Nichols, describing the shirts' awesome expressive capabilities. "That's what makes them distracting."

<sup>1</sup> The parents of one girl suspended for violating the ban filed a claim asking the school to rescind the ban, teach sensitivity training, apologize to their daughter, and pay the family \$100,000. The school board said no.

<sup>2</sup> The harassment allegedly included threatening to "sacrifice" the kids and drink their blood, and, perhaps worst of all, forcing them to listen to satanic literature read aloud.

<sup>3</sup> One astute board member pointed out that red and black are the school's colors.

<sup>4</sup> Taravella is the alma mater of Manson bassist Twiggy Ramirez. Coincidence?

<sup>5</sup> A chicken?

# TALK ABOUT A HELL-OF-A-DEAL

From comic book legend Todd McFarlane comes the live-action special-effects movie event of the year - **SPAWN**.



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## EXPOSURE

**BUENA PARK**

**MEAN STREET**  
This monthly mag devoted to the OC and inland Empire scenes was the first publication to interview Korn (in 1993) after the boys moved to Huntington Beach. When Gwen Stefani disengaged from her boyfriend Tony Kanal in No Doubt's hit "Don't Speak," Kanal spoke exclusively to *Mean Street* about the breakup.

**GARDEN GROVE**

**STARPOOL PARTIES**  
This crash pad in Garden Grove was named for its backyard star-shaped pool. Parties here were a rite of passage for young bands, who played there before donning bottle rockets. The fun ended in 1997, but Starpool lives on as the name of Save Ferris's record label.

**FULLERTON**

**369**  
Ska bands shun this 21-and-over sports bar, but Sugar Ray dig it. The Offspring's Face to Face scored a record deal after playing a showcase here.

**ORANGE**

**BILLY ZOOM**  
The ex-X-guitarist and born-again Christian now runs the camps of No Doubt, Avril Lavigne, and virtually every rockabilly guy in SoCal. Though he pulled off his guitar gear to play for a reunion show for X, he saves most of his guitar playing for church on Sunday.

**HUNTINGTON BEACH**

**JASON LEE**  
Before he starred in *Chasing Amy* and *Kissing a Fool*, Lee, like the majority of aimless OC teens, rode his BMX around from his HB hood down to the boardwalk to eat corn dogs and scarf bates. At 18, he got a job, but then he discovered that twenty-nothing angst pays a whole lot better.

**UNDERGROUND CHICKEN SOUND**  
Kom's rehearsal studio, where the band put on shows for two bucks in the early '90s.

**ELECTRIC CHAIR**  
One-stop shop for shiny synthetic clothing, posters, records, and bargains on purple suede creepers. The obligatory piercing studio is in back.

**COSTA MESA**

**BLACK FLYS EYEWEAR**  
A must-stop for shades—every for the OC skater/surf uniform. Marilyn Manson shops at the House of Flys here, so do Gwen Stefani, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and the Offspring.

**THE TIKI BAR**  
Formerly the Cuckoo's Nest—a laid-back hard-core club whose alumni include T.S.O.L., Black Flag, Circle Jerks, and the Adicts—it's now a trendy tropical joint frequented by baggyjeansed dudes who shoot pool as Save Ferris and Red Hot Chili Fish perform on the other side of the room.

**THE LAB**  
A solar-proclaimed anti-mall, The Lab is an interactive, open-air consumer palace with couple of rock joints, most of which were trashed during a Sublime show a few years back. On Sundays, The Gypsy Dancehouse house brings in DJs to spin ambient and dub.

**MIKE NESS**  
The Social Distortion leader and Costa Mesa resident helped turn knobs on the recent major-label debut from Huntington Beach punksters Wank.

BUENA PARK  
GARDEN GROVE  
FULLERTON  
ANAHEIM  
ORANGE  
SANTA ANA  
COSTA MESA  
IRVINE  
HUNTINGTON BEACH  
GARDEN GROVE  
COSTA MESA  
IRVINE  
PACIFIC OCEAN

LINE NUGAS

## ANAHEIM

### VIVA LAS VEGAS

The all-ages crowd briefly congregated at this warehouse near Anaheim Stadium during the mid-nineties' Ska Luau, which featured ska jockeys Reel Big Fish, Aquabats, and the Nuxx Brothers, among one of the area's defining moments.

### THE FIRECRACKER LOUNGE AT CATTLEMAN'S INN

Casual shows in this kissy-plane-bar lounge were booked by No Doubt's Tom Dumont. On one occasion, two years ago, following an opening set by Gwen Stefani and Dumont, a drunk Brad Nowell did an acoustic gig (since heavily bootlegged).

## SANTA ANA

### KOO'S ART CAFE

One of the last all-ages venues left standing, this fusionновка housed ravers on weekend nights with spike-headed kids listening to their lungs go pop as they smoked their first cigarettes. The best spot to check out OC's up-and-comers, like emoscore outfit Gameface or synthpopsters Teen Heroes.

## NEWPORT BEACH

### THE WHEREHOUSE

Pop culture Roy, they come from Newport Beach, a slice of coastal white bread where there's nowhere to plop, save velour dress-up in the backlot lounges like this one. The group, then known as the Shrinky Dinks, honed their metal chops here without anyone noticing.

## IRVINE

### METROPOLIS

This pool hall/dance club across the street from UCI, Irvine, is the focal point of the bubbling OC alternative scene. Überzone's Q occasionally comes up from Anaheim to man Metropolis's turntables.

## MISSION BEACH

### LINDA'S DOLL HUT

The hard core punk hangout is best known for its "secret" shows by OC's Offspring and Social Distortion. Weeks of Bobby Amadio are dedicated to how to write songs watching bands here.

### THE QUALITY HOTEL

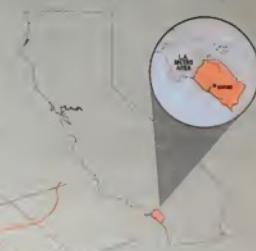
Back in 1992, this down-and-out hotel became the birthplace of the current OC rock scene. John Pendle, a concierge and aspiring promoter, turned the hotel's ballroom into an all-ages concert hall for Sublime, Thee Oh Sees, Thee Oh Sees, Thelonious Monks, and Green Day played. The shows stopped in the summer of '93 after Pendle got upped. "People at hotels aren't used to vomit or paper towels with blood," says Pendle. "They consider this a bad thing."

## ANAHEIM

# California Screaming

The juice of Orange County

The latest industry wisdom is that if you want to sell records, it helps if your band is from Southern California. And right now, the smart money is on Orange County. This nondescript stretch of beachfront hamlets and suburban malls between Los Angeles and San Diego is home to No Doubt, Sugar Ray, and Reel Big Fish, and Korn even relocated from dullsville Bakersfield to cut their teeth here. So what gives? The key to any scene is bored teenagers, and Orange County has loads of them. While major-label success is usually that death knell for any spot with even a modicum of cool, Orange County, as this guide shows, shouldn't be flat-lining any time soon. ERIK HIMMELBACH



## KEY

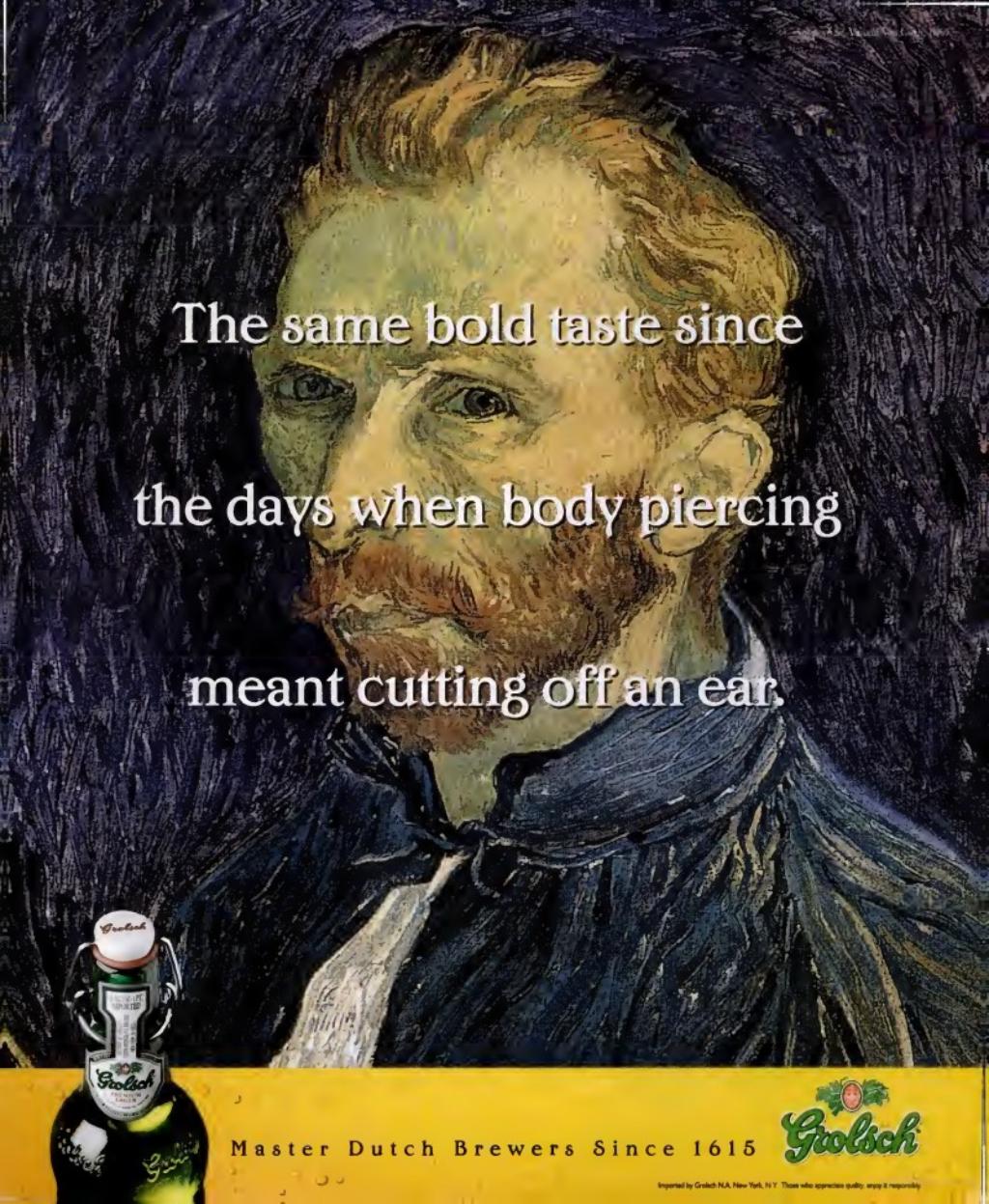
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# The Bristol Method

Trip-hop pioneers Massive Attack heat up the chill-out room

"We're some disagreeable motherfuckers," says Massive Attack's Daddy G with a leering grin. "We drive everyone away." Never mind that moments earlier in a posh Manhattan lounge, the NBA-scale G, dapper in a pinstriped jacket, shamelessly charmed an entourage of local drones into utter submission. But whatever the group's collective personality disorders, at least they can say they drive away only the best. In the course of years spent defining the terms of DJ-driven pop, the Bristol, England, dub-hop collective has counted in its ranks Tricky, Everything but the Girl's Tracey Thorn, soul diva Shara Nelson, avant-club chanteuse Nicolette, and veteran reggae crooner Horace Andy. Whether pushed or not (and the group is rather vague on the particulars), all but Andy have moved on, and the result is an outfit with an identity as slippery as a jellied eel.

Massive Attack's collaborative history began when G (Grant Marshall) and core members 3-D (Robert Del Naje) and Mushroom (Andrew Vowles) worked as DJs and MCs on Bristol's legendary Wild Bunch collective in the mid-'80s. Based on traditional Jamaican sound systems, the mobile parties brought rhymers, mixers, and the occasional singer together to flex their skills. But Wild Bunch jams were not the usual spiffed-out dancehall sessions, splintered-out though they may have been. "That was when hip-hop had just started happening in Bristol," recalls 3-D, a chunky, high-strung sports fanatic. "I was into punk and new wave. Mush was into the 2-Tone ska thing, and G was into reggae. Hip-hop brought all of it together."

The Wild Bunch was in turn the model for what became Massive: a central committee of rhyming beat-makers with satellite vocalists and instrumentalists. Taking cues from kindred groove innovators Soul II Soul ("the first truly British soul music," says G) and Adrien Sherwood's On-U Sound dub collective, Massive blueprinted the so-called Bristol Sound on their 1991 debut, *Blue Lines*. Its viscous hip-hop soul was the chill music of choice for a nation of tweaked ravers, and the stoned throning of Tricky, 3-D, and Daddy G rep-

resented the first U.K. rap that didn't suck.

Massive's rimshots were heard 'round the world: Their grooves presaged the trip-hop of neighbors Portishead and the polyglot Mo' Wax label; their group architecture has been emulated in outfitts from Montreal's Bren Ven 3000 to Bristol locals Roni Size and Reprazent. And their Melenkolic label is now releasing music by such like-minded friends as spacey Becherach cultists Alpha and chiaroscuro string arranger Craig Armstrong.

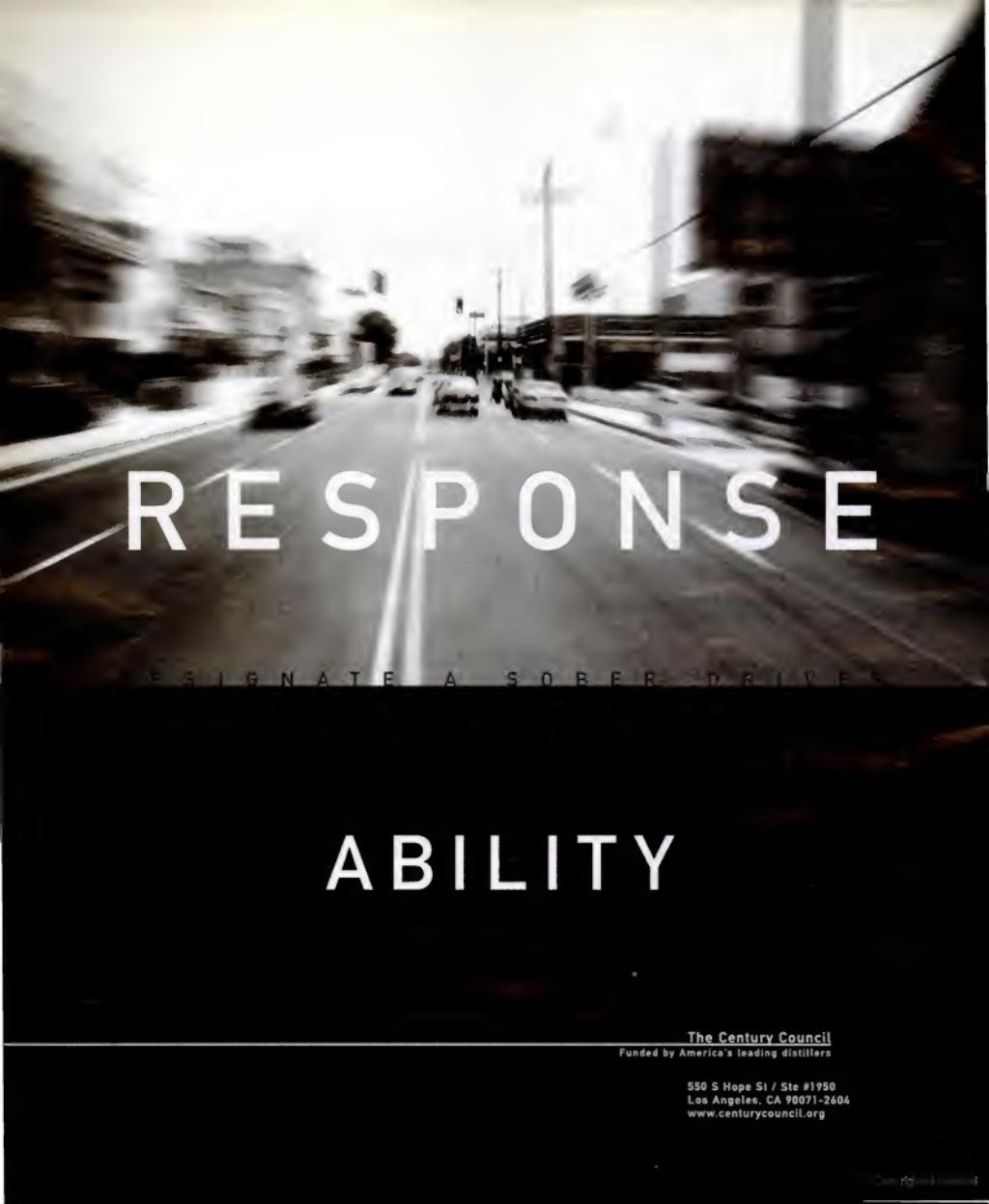
With the new *Mezzanine*, the finely etched follow-up to 1994's lush *Protection*, Massive's garden of sonic delights is flashing thorns. Ominous sub-bass lines, outsize rimshots, and tidal waves of rock guitar swell up from a murky limbo, while the lyrics shift between the impressionistic and the unintelligible. It's a set of noirs that reflect the psychic burnout of a life spent deep in clubland—a post-high, pre-crash territory where the mind starts playing serious tricks on you. "It's partly a journey through nightfall," says 3-D. "But it's also about the difficulty of relationships. They'll both do your head in."

As a production team, Massive have acquired an almost mystical status. Even a guitar band like Radiohead has come under their influence—so much so there's talk of the trio remixing *OK Computer*. "They're just incredible," gushes a slightly lit Colin Greenwood, bass player for Radiohead, who joins us later at a bar. The conversation ranges over the benefits of life in boring college towns (Bristol or Radiohead's Oxford), the jigsaw-puzzle logic of modern songwriting, and the psychic/physical stress of a musical life spent largely in front of a computer. D's copious drink consumption, apparently, is one attempt to address the latter.

"I'm always the most obsessive, the most belligerent, the most likely to be pulling my hair out, the one with the most trouble sleeping," D says, suggesting the group's druggy mix is basically an oral pharmaceutical for troubled minds. So what's the music's correlative: a blunt rolled with black and blond hash, a palo-cybin shake and pill chaser, or a dose of Ecstasy and Prozac? "Probably a toxic cocktail of all of the above," D says, stroking his chin. "Definitely." WILL HERMES

Doing your head in: from left, 3-D, Daddy G, and Mushroom.

DONALD MILNE



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## The Mint is the Message

Testamints: the soul-saving freshmaker

The Christian product market used to be a simple operation, comprised mainly of the world's best-selling book—the King James Bible—and its numerous dumbed-down variants. But trendy spiritual types craving sound-bite salvation can now choose from a litany of fast-faith march that includes "Fear God" skull caps (which cop the swishy "No Fear" font) and the curiously pious Testamints. Hyped as the "mint with the message," the sugar-free candies come stamped with tiny crosses and are individually wrapped in an easy-to-digest biblical verse. Think of them as a Happy Meal tie-in with God.

Its mission well under way—2.5 million packs of the freshmaks have been sold in Christian retail outlets since their release last fall—Testamints, Inc. is now pushing into the secular market, bidding for the soul and sin-encrusted maws of Kmart shoppers. Company seigneur Bill Tilley, who says the New Jersey-based outfit also plans to launch a Scripture-wrapped lollipop later this year, thinks the mint's value-added message makes it unique among sugary confections. As he points out, "It's the kind of candy you could accept from strangers." SHOSHANA BERGER

Christ all-minty:  
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## INCONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

# Johnson & Johnson

Searching for sex's other subliminal sell. by Paul Lukas

Sex sells, but who's buying? The consumer landscape is brimming with sexual imagery and sex-laden marketing campaigns, but a quick survey of the worst offenders—beer commercials, blue jeans ads, *Baywatch*—finds only an ample supply of T&A. There's nary a naughty male body part in sight. Sure, the Freudians will tell you that everything from a Corvette to a cigar is a phallic symbol, but just try to find some genuine male anatomy out there—hard to do.

I'm happy to report that phallocentric sales pitches do exist, and not only at Ye Olde Sex



Oooh, Mr. Big! Suggestive candy for the squeeze-me-lemon-till-the-juice-runs-down-my-legs crowd.

Shoppe—you just have to dig a bit deeper to find them. Consider, for example, Mr. Long (Sharmadan Food Industries), a candy bar with a mildly suggestive name and an unmistakably crotch-driven slogan: WHEN YOU'RE THE LONG, THEY CALL YOU MISTER. Whoa, is that a totally rude marketing angle or are you just glad to see me?

Mr. Long hails from the Middle East, which brings up the obvious question of whether men in that part of the world are unusually obsessed with the size of their candy bars. They may have good reason to be—Mr. Long doesn't exactly live up to its name, measuring only six inches from stem to stern, and that includes the rather generous-size wrapper. Meanwhile, a Canadian version of Mr. Long speaks more softly (it's called Mr. Big) (William Neilson Ltd.), which isn't nearly as piquant (but at nine inches, carries a bigger stick, raising some interesting questions about our neighbors to the north).

Of course, size isn't everything. As handily demonstrated by Meggi Cock Soup (Nestlé USA Inc.) and Grace Cock Flavored Soup Mix (Grace,

Kennedy & Co. Ltd.), both products of Jamaica, sometimes the smut is in the details. The manufacturers would no doubt have us believe that these items, despite their scandalous product names, are simply chicken broth mixes. A variety of libidinous subtexts suggests otherwise. As one of the packages explains, cock soup is equally suitable "as a starting course for a main meal, as a snack on its own, [or] as a base for many home-made recipes," which is obviously code for, respectively, foreplay, a quickie, and a dizzying range of bizarre bedroom activities. One of the mixes makes "3-4 servings," which just goes to show that some people like more cock than others, while the other packet simply "makes one pint," allowing the consumer to determine how many servings of cock this constitutes. The Grace packet goes so far as to describe cock soup as "a party time favorite with adults." It's also billed as an ideal "pick-me-up" with toasted bammmy," a reference whose precise meaning eludes me, but you've got to admit it sounds dirty.

But enough of these fringe products—sometimes the most explicit example is the one we'd least expect, the one propped right under our noses. Such is the case with Gerber Graduates Meat Sticks (Gerber Products Company), sort of a Vienna sausage for toddlers. At first glance, the illustration on the label appears to show a stick of the product firmly grasped in a child's clenched fist. After a closer look, however, one gets the distinct impression the cherubic hand may actually be engaged in what might politely be described as an act of onanism.

Go ahead, call me depraved. That's basically what Gerber spokeswoman Maltesa Webb-Dunn did when I asked if anyone at the company had noticed the illustration's arguably lewd visuals. "I don't know who's raising these concerns or issues," she said, "but from our perspective here it's absolutely absurd, and I think I'm going to leave it at that." Not leaving it at that, she added, "I mean, this is simply a package designed for a toddler's product, and that's it. And I will not even acknowledge any comments or concerns beyond that."

Fair enough, but I'm not the only one who finds the Gerber illustration a tad risqué. I've pointed out the label to a number of people, all of whom have had more or less the same reaction: "You're nuts, I don't see anything—holy shit, it's true!" Could all of these people simply have their minds in the gutter? Maybe. But to avoid any confusion, in the future Gerber should consider restricting its product line to strained pees. ▶

William Neilson Ltd., 277 Gladstone Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M1J 3L9, Canada; Grace, Kennedy & Co. Ltd., 64 Harbour St., Kingston, NJ 07032-0001; Nestlé USA Inc., PO Box 29050, Glenview, IL 60090-0950; Gerber Products Company, 446 W. State St., Fremont, MI 49413

Readers, manufacturers, and publishers are encouraged to send products, gadgets, promotional literature, and suggestions to Paul Lukas, Spin, 8 W. 18th St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10011; [consumer@interport.net](mailto:consumer@interport.net).

## NEW PRODUCT FACE-OFF

## Second Chances

A defibrillator vs. an anti-adhesive

Life, alas, is pretty much a one-take affair. Given that most of us, no matter how spontaneously proficient we think we might be, are actually rash, clumsy mistake-makers, the potential market for products that give us a second chance is huge. That Jewel bumper sticker you slapped on your car in a moment of Stoli-inspired irony.... That fatal night of Gwar records, Gilmour GHB, and repeated attempts to flip a Volkswagen that sent your overtaxed heart into sudden cardiac arrest.... Wouldn't it be nice if there were readily available, easy-to-use, cost-effective products to help you remedy your bad decisions? Q. SEATO

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<b>CONTACT INFO</b>	SurviveLink Corporation (612) 939-4181	Doumar Products Inc. (888) buy-sudu
<b>PRICE</b>	\$3,000 and up, depending on options	\$4.99 to \$5.99
<b>OBTRUSIVE PURPOSE</b>	To deliver electric shock to victim of sudden cardiac arrest.	To remove sticky things (labels, tape, glue) from things you don't want them stuck to any longer.
<b>UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION</b>	"The one-button operation and voice prompting ensures virtually anyone can operate [it] with minimal training."	Can separate duct tape from toilet paper with no structural damage to either material.
<b>OPTIONS</b>	MDLink™ Software, ALS Electrode Adapters, Water-proof Hard Case	None
<b>BONUS BENEFIT</b>	"When you're done saving lives, FirstSave saves your most needed data."	After you remove a questionably placed sticker, you can exercise your bed judgment all over again: The sticker retains its stickiness.
<b>POTENTIAL DRAWBACK</b>	Someone, somewhere, somehow will figure out how to use it to get high.	May cause you to waste lots of time conducting various duct tape/paper product experiments.
<b>USER-FRIENDLINESS</b>	High. "If Uncommon and Non-Breathable and No Pulse Then Place Electrode."	High. "Quick, Safe, Easy."
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THOSE WHO APPRECIATE





THE KOBAL COLLECTION

## MOVIES

# Waiting for Godzilla

Can this summer's presumptive blockbuster capture the sheer weirdness—the epic kitsch—of the late, great Japanese monster movie? by Steve Erickson

At the end of one of the more recent entries in Japan's endless series of *Godzilla* films, the hero gazes out on a smoldering megalopolis and sighs to his girlfriend, "Someday I hope to show you a Tokyo free of monsters." He's in luck. In Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich's new, American *Godzilla*, the big guy has made his way from the Philippines to New York City, and what was once an Asian problem is now ours, as seems only fair. As the awakened id of the atomic age, Godzilla always was our baby.

"I never actually saw the original *Godzilla* in its true Japanese version," writer/producer Devlin told me recently, "until a couple of years ago. Before then, all I'd seen was the version that ran on TV here in L.A. when I was a kid." In the late '50s and early '60s, from the far reaches of Brooklyn to the San Fernando Valley, the *Million Dollar Movie*, or shows

like it, figured out that running the same film over and over and over didn't bore the kids, it mesmerized them—and *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* was most mesmerizing of all. "I watched it every afternoon after school," Devlin remembers. *Godzilla* was irresistibly weird: First, there were all those Japanese people in it (barely ten years after World War II), speaking in a disembodied English that didn't sync with their mouths, which was somehow enormously satisfying, certifying our recent triumph over them. And what the hell was Perry Mason doing in there? He didn't seem quite part of the proceedings, the aloof American commenting on Japanese disarray, even if he did get buried in the rubble at the end along with everyone else. (In fact, Raymond Burr's scenes were filmed in the States and then spliced into the American release.)

Today you don't need a degree in Advanced Metaphor to figure out what *Godzilla* was about, or why the Japanese would invent the first great postnuclear movie monster. They were, after all, the only people who'd ever had an

The godfather (above): the original post-nuke behemoth, inspiration for an entire generation of non-mammalian Japanese movie monsters, now father to an American remake.



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atomic bomb dropped on them. But there was something else at work in *Godzilla*, something that Americans didn't understand: The great traumatic event of 20th century Japan was not the atomic bomb—it was an announcement by the Emperor on the first of January 1946, when he informed his people he wasn't God. It blew them away. It also blew them into the 21st century; what did they need the 20th for anymore? All it had gotten them was Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and No God. So Japan went directly on to the next millennium and made themselves a new god for a new age.

Unlike all the great prenuclear movie monsters, from Kong to Frankenstein to the Wolf Man, there was nothing warm or fuzzy about *Godzilla*, nothing remotely human. *Godzilla* was Apocalypse, Dread from the Deep of Tokyo Bay—cold, wet, and radioactive. In *The Forbidden Planet*, an American science-fiction picture of the same period, the psyches of the victims create the monsters that devour them. *Godzilla* was the monster the Japanese psyche created; humiliated by the war, the Japanese believed they deserved *Godzilla*. They thrilled at the way he lay waste to them, and at the end of the picture, when the monster was killed with an "oxygen-destroyer," it was agonizing, a kind of decide. So they brought him back to punish them, over and over—in *Son of Godzilla*, *Godzilla's Revenge*, *Godzilla Raids Again*, *Godzilla vs. Gigan*, *Godzilla vs. Megalon*, *Godzilla vs. Biollante*, *Godzilla vs. the Thing*, *Godzilla vs. Destroyer*, *Godzilla vs. the Sea Monster*, *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster*, *Godzilla vs. the Cosmic Monster*, *Godzilla vs. Monster Zero*, *Godzilla vs. Space Godzilla*.

"In our version," Devlin says now, "we've tried to hearken back to the spirit of the very first *Godzilla*, rather than all the sequels." But the most striking thing about the original *Godzilla*, if you go back and look at it, is that it isn't much fun; shot in stark, documentary black and white, with funeral music and the haunted little faces of dying children, it's the bleakest, most joyless monster classic ever. It wasn't until *Rodan* one year later that the Japanese started kicking out the jams on this stuff. Not as affecting as *Godzilla*, *Rodan* at least had the virtues of a big cheesy period piece sweeping across a blue Kodachrome sky, happily snatching up blithe newlyweds for lunch. After that, things only got looper: There was Ghidorah, a three-headed flying dragon; the Dogora, a fleet of flying octopuses; Varan, something like a huge flying squirrel; and Gamera, a colossal flying turtle—all culminating in 1968's *Destroy All Monsters!*, with the whole crew summering together on Monster Island.

Of the First Wave of Japanese monsters, the most whacked-out was surely 1962's *Mothra*. In that film, a gangster spirals away a couple of ancient Japanese princesses from their island tribe to sing in his Tokyo theatrical revue, and in retaliation the tribe sics a giant caterpillar on the city, which crashes through dams and slithers up boulevards while also metamorphosing into a moth. Did I mention the princesses are six inches tall? You can only wonder what collective psychic nightmare this came from: Reptiles may be the stuff of monsters, as are apes, wolves, men who have been mummified 3,000 years, men made out of other men's body parts, men (or things) from other planets. But a vindictive caterpillar is just plain peculiar, in a way that's



And Barney walks the earth a free lizard:  
*Godzilla vs. Gigan*

hard to consciously account for.

Americans can't help but see all this as kitsch. For the Japanese it's more complicated: The staggering rise of their country from the nuclear ashes "has turned *Godzilla* the Japanese Superhero," argues author Takayuki Tatsumi. *Godzilla* and his friends have all the resonance of mythology, which in recent Japanese movies has been updated in the extreme. In the *Tetsuo* films of the early '90s, for instance, the modern monster is a creation not of the nuclear age gone haywire but of the cyber age, the humanity of its protagonist giving way to metal until he's basically a walking fuse box with a power drill for a penis. *Godzilla* was slowly humanized; in the *Tetsuo* films, the process is reversed. It can't be an accident

that the lead actor is named Tomorrow Taguchi. On the other hand, the last bastion of humanity in current Japanese sci-fi has been the animation explosion, which is a little ironic, of course, since there's not a single real human being in any of these pictures. The phenomenal *Akira* (1989) wasn't a monster movie as such, but the monsters took over in the anime masterpieces it unleashed—including *Princess Mononoke*, the highest grossing film ever in Japan, which just won the Japanese Academy Award for best film of 1997 (to be released here later this year). *Anime* reached its delicious high (or low, depending on how you want to look at it) a few years back with *Urotsukidöji*, a four-hour epic in which the Overfiend returns to claim his place on earth against the efforts of several adolescents, apparently the only people with the courage and wherewithal to resist him. The plot's completely convoluted, the tone often mawkishly childlike in the way of much anime—which only makes all the more shocking the fact that *Urotsukidöji* is entirely, jaw-droppingly pornographic. Every ten minutes the Overfiend has intimate relations with a random and helpless schoolgirl who often literally explodes at the moment of rapture.

In America, our recent science-fiction movies haven't had much use for mythic resonance, ever since the last moments of *The Return of the Jedi* when George Lucas lost his nerve and refused to blow up Luke Skywalker with his father on the Death Star. Our postnuclear myths have become increasingly sanitized, with only anonymous faceless victims and no unhappy moments, which means they're not myths at all, because in all the great myths there have always been consequences. Devlin points out that the producer of the original *Godzilla* "was inspired to make the movie after flying over the Bikini Islands, where there had been so much nuclear testing. But nuclear holocaust isn't so uppermost in everyone's minds anymore." So, Devlin and Emmerich have made the 1998 model as much an environmental hazard as anything, a big walking mass of nuclear waste. Devlin wouldn't say whether it was a flight over New York City that inspired his remake, but it hardly matters: The new *Godzilla* isn't really about dread or apocalypse, it's about the same thing the dinosaurs were about in the *Jurassic Park* films—notthing more or less than the biggest and coolest monsters that movie technology can produce. It remains to be seen whether he'll crash his way into our dreams the way he did on the *Million Dollar Movie*. •

## SHORT SUBJECTS

### SCREEN

#### *The Kingdom II*

directed by Lars von Trier  
(October Films)

*Wunderkind, megalomaniac, cinema scientist. With *Breaking the Waves*, Lars von Trier proved he could take a seacharne story of love and redemption—the director himself calls the plot "suffocating"—overlay an incongruous dynamic visual style, and make the story not only palatable but powerful. Now, with his four-and-a-half-*



hour *The Kingdom II* (episodes 4-8 of the stunning Danish TV series), he's applied the same restless handheld-camera, anything-goes editing style to the hospital soap opera. Like *Chicago Hope*. But good. Of course, *Chicago Hope* didn't dare feature decapitated, splintering-mutation dishwashers or a talking, 20-foot, week-old demon spawn. Von Trier's having fun with both content and form, both the "what" and the "how." The tuxedoed, grinning, boyish director appears at the end of each episode, flirts, invites the audience to prepare to take the evil along with the good." His fun is ours. BOB DAVIS

#### *Clockwatchers*

directed by Jill Sprecher  
(BMG Independents)

When the "what" of a movie is as slight as in Jill Sprecher's *Clockwatchers*—the plot aks, "Who's been stealing coffee cups from the executive lounge?"—then the "how" better rock. Sadly, the "how" here consists of self-conscious quirksiness, antisocial set design, and over-the-top Parker Posey-ish acting (from Toni Collette, Lisa Kudrow, and Posey herself). The wacky tempos at the Global Credit Association snuff dry-ease markers, staple the



hems of uncooperative skirts, and collect those little plastic colored-animals—that-hang-from-daiguri-glasses. Ha. Ha. Writing for "Girls on Film," the critical arm of sundance.com, Lisa (no last name, of course) calls *Clockwatchers* a "darkly funny story" for "anyone who has ever been a temp—and I personally can't think of anyone who hasn't." Scary. B.D.

TODD McFARLANE'S

# SPAWN

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## CONTENT PROVIDER

## Steal This Column

Angry Gen-X thinker Tom Frank has become a star by arguing that "hipness" is a corporate sham. Does that make *Spin* a fraud? by Tad Friend

Imagine a product called B-Gone that, say, reduces some kind of unspecified waxy buildup. Now suppose that the B-Gone people had given Don DeLillo a fellowship enabling him to write his mysterious novel *Underworld*. Would you feel differently, reading the book? Probably not. But what if DeLillo had his Lenny Bruce character dab in a little B-Gone before going onstage to savage *The Man*? Or had Bruce refer to B-Gone in his monologue as "kicksville"? Would you notice? Huri the book aside? Try to ignore it? (*Man, that B-Gone is outta sight!*)

Frank writes in a *Baffler* essay collection, *Commodify Your Dissent*, has been reduced to little more than "an official aesthetic of consumer society...the inescapable rock'n'roll soundtrack, dreadlocks and ponytails bounding into Taco Bell's, a drunken, swinging-camera epiphany of tennis shoes, outlaw soda pops, and mind-bending dandruff shampoos."

When not lapsing into gradsppeak (he calls the famous "1984" Macintosh commercial "an implement of counter-hegemonic empowerment"), Frank has a firebrand's conviction. "You can't outrun the combine," he warns darkly, "or even stay ahead of them for very long; it is their race-track, and that's them waiting at the finish line to congratulate you on how outrageous your new style is, on how you shocked those stuffy prudes out in the Heartland." His implication is that magazines such as *Spin* are particularly complicit, that we use our "edge" to sell ads, to provide corporate America with a safe cover from which to market to free-spending postcolleagues. That we essentially broker the transaction in which a Verve hook makes sense in a Nike ad. After the staff here had read Frank's salvos, we went on a weekend retreat to a sweat lodge, got naked, and talked very seriously about closing the magazine down. But then we decided, Nah.

Still, Frank's point is trenchant and disturbing. His argument amounts to a meta-narrative, a rant that steps back from examining cultural products to examining the means

Had DeLillo, chronicler of our paranoid secret history, chosen to sell product placements in his recent novel—he didn't, of course—he would have been participating in the latest technique of mass control. As commercial speech leeches into every cranny of our lives, from baggage carousels to stickers on bananas, the advertising/entertainment colossus has had to raise its game to keep us interested. Younger consumers are often beguiled into purchasing expensive products in the belief that by doing so they are actually striking a blow against the very corporate order that is manipulating them. Take two current campaigns: Apple's "Think Different" and Sprite's "Obey Your Thirst." Each seemingly invites you to think or feel yourself, to rebel; each is actually an authoritarian summons to buy.

The most outspoken, and off-spoken, exposer of this bit of double-think is Thomas Frank, a 32-year-old University of Chicago Ph.D. with particular interests in music and advertising. So prolific he makes Michael Lind and Joyce Carol Oates look narcoleptic, Frank has bantered his message in the well-known Chicago-based journal the *Baffler*—which he edits—and in every outlet from the Web site Tripod to the Nation to the *Washington Post*. His insistent theme is that we are being dehumanized by false products and icons, that "hip," once fiercely opposed to the "square" consumer culture, now runs in harness with it. The consumer culture,

## SHORT SUBJECTS

## PRINT

**Sun Records, Sam and Dave, Black Sabbath**

*For the Record* oral history series  
edited by Dave Marsh  
(Avon Press)

Rock books (and let's face it, rock magazines) are the pins of print, huddling us into bed with stars just so we can feel the fire. If you have a soul-burning need to lay down with Sam Moore or Ronnie James Dio and don't mind waking with sticky hair, low self-esteem, and ink-stained fingers, Dave Marsh has a series



he'd like to sell you: a multi-volume oral history of rock and soul music. "What you hear is a moment when the singers and musicians looked deep into their lives and emotions, found a part of their soul that maybe they didn't even know existed, and projected it." The quote is about Sun Studios (and sounds like Grail Marcus after Ecstasy and brain damage), but it stands for the series. It's a perverse genre, these pulp transcripts of spoken-word histories in the modern age: books on tape on paper. JOSHUA CLOVER

**The Sinaloa Story**

by Barry Gifford  
(Harcourt Brace & Company)

The latest from America's boomer noirist Barry Gifford serves up a brutally arbitrary world, in which guys use violence and money to get sex and girls use sex and violence to get money. The rest is just running the permutations through a cast burdened with wacky contrived names (Cobra Boy, Thankful Priest, the rodeo bull Yggdrasil, etc.). Like a down-market Cormac McCarthy, Gifford has a nose for moral vacuums and a taste for the occasional sweet description. But if he once had an edge for detail, he lost it at the movies: Twice a page scribe for David Lynch, Gifford seems to be relying on someone else's vision to fill in the *Sinaloa* scene. Instead, he seems tirelessly fascinated with watching his back-stabbers try to rinse out the blood and cum stains with alcohol.

Even the reflective moments can be deadly: "What you think," announces one character, "can make you crazy." A theory Gifford perhaps means to test elsewhere. J.C.



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of production to reveal how we're being lulled, gulled, and fleeced. The first searing modern meta-narrative was George Trow's book *Within the Context of No Context*, published in 1981 and reissued last year. By turns pell-mell and baffling, the book has become a touchstone for many magazine writers, because it explains the tenuousness of their own authority. A tennis magazine's secret charter, Trow explains, is not to inform readers about tennis but "to make its readers uncomfortable by the calculated use of certain icons associated with tennis, so that the readers will turn, for comfort, to the products advertised in our pages and buy them."

Novelist David Foster Wallace is also onto how anxiety is created and soothed. "Since television must seek to attract viewers by offering a dreamy promise of escape

internal exile, the thrashing release, the glorious never never never," Frank writes. "They manufacture lifestyle; we live lives." To be charitable, Frank is practicing an indie brand of consumer evasiveness, which means you patronize mainstream labels, Hollywood studios, and superstores only in the sense that "patronize" means "sneer at."

Frank is essentially saying that art only counts if the creator has no taint of commerce—that purity matters more than theme, craft, emotion, intelligence, or playfulness. That formulation dismisses even *Mystery Science Theater 3000* and Radiohead, and vaults community theater to the pinnacle of culture. Unwilling or unable to distinguish between Master P and Puff Daddy, Frank sees all success as a sell-out. He writes that from "the embarrassingly faked Woody Guthrie accents of Bob Dylan....

**The counterculture, Frank writes, has been reduced to little more than "an official aesthetic of consumer society...the inescapable rock'n'roll soundtrack, dreadlocks and ponytails bounding into Taco Bells, a drunken, swinging-camera epiphany of tennis shoes, outlaw soda pops, and mind-bending dandruff shampoos"**

from daily life," he writes, "and since stats confirm that so grossly much of ordinary U.S. life is watching TV, TV's whispered promises must somehow undercut television-watching in theory (Joe, Joe, there's a world where life is lively, where nobody spends six hours a day unwinding before a piece of furniture) while reinforcing television-watching in practice (Joe, Joe, your best and only access to this world is TV')."

In another essay, the title piece of his collection *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, Wallace detects the same manipulation when he takes a luxury cruise. The Professional Smiles flashed at him hide contempt for a sucker. You are "being entertained by someone who clearly dislikes you," he writes, "and feeling that you deserve the dislike at the same time that you resent it."

Frank's recent book, *The Conquest of Cool*, says this kind of cynical mass manipulation really began in the '60s, when advertising glommed onto the symbology of protest. He shows how, for example, Pontiac's commercial for its 1969 muscle car, the GTO, appropriated black unrest with a hard rock band singing, preposterously, "Big and bad / Pipes open wide, don't hear no one talkin' back." As Frank notes in a much-discussed March *Harper's* essay about pop music's kitschification, many people now "conclude that they have no choice but to marvel at the process of cultural mass production itself, to snicker at the various fads and stars and tastes foisted upon us or our parents." Visiting a club in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Frank mocks the patrons' attempts to rebel against alternative culture or other forms of—as he sees it—prefab schlock: "By then [the club] was jammed with about 3,000 people, all there to consume that species of deviance most to their liking."

Well, they were probably there to drink and dance and maybe get laid. But Frank believes we're all veal calves, lowing in a lifestyle pen. Beneath Frank's gloom lurks the smugness common to all writers of meta-narratives (and I'm speaking smugly here myself); he thinks he's succeeded in the desire Wallace described in his cruise article, the desire to "distance myself in the crew's eyes from the bovine herd I'm part of." Frank and his pals are still authentic, because they listen to obscure beyond-alt-rock bands like Microtonz and the Embarrassment. "For us it's the secession, the

to the astoundingly pretentious works of groups like Iron Butterfly and the Doors, the relics of the counterculture reek of affection and phoniness...." The Monkees, sure, but Bob Dylan? Pursue this off-the-charts logic far enough and it becomes off-the-grid and soon you're holed up in a cabin with the FBI blaring "To Sir With Love" to make you surrender.

Surplus on cultural production, Frank is weak on cultural reception—on how we might fight back. "We need," Frank wrote in a *Nation* essay, "...to rediscover the language of class, the non-market-friendly concept of industrial democracy." Great, we'll get on that. In *The Conquest of Cool* he says, absurdly, that all that "changed during the sixties, it now seems, were the strategies of consumerism," and identifies only a single example of true revolt: Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*, a consumers' guerrilla handbook that urged people to dent their cans in the supermarket to get over discounts.

The *Baffler*'s Stephen Duncombe takes up the rebellion issue in *Notes From Underground*, a thoughtful book about the zine world. Duncombe's analysis of the commercial culture's ability to turn any artistic statement into "an affirmation of its own message of consumption" echoes Frank's, but he suggests that irony may in fact be a "pragmatic response." Examine all messages for commercial overlay, and create art that resists co-optation: "Just try selling Nikes with the Dead Kennedys' 'Kill the Poor.'" Punk alienation is the true path—as the Ramones shouted: "I don't like Kermit King / I don't like anything / And I'm against it."

Yet business cheerfully co-opts even the most inimical messages. Witness Forbes's appropriation of the communist epithet "Capitalist Tool." Or fashion's having turned heroin—whose users couldn't give a rat's ass about culture—into "heroin chic." Duncombe ends up reversing course and deciding that it's "only a matter of time until 'Kill the Poor' sells Nikes too." "I sometimes fear," he concludes, "that irony also keeps the underground forever living in a dominant world that it can see through, with ironic vision, but never escape." Yep. Consumer culture bulldozes irony; the producers of the Spice Girls don't care if we're snickering, as long as we're buying. As the deeply authentic Alanis Morissette would say, "Isn't it ironic?" ■

## SHORT SUBJECTS



### Roommate Stories

by Cheryl Bealer-Wynton and Jeff Friend  
Sex and murder appear only as fantasy objects in *Roommate Stories*—an old-school typewriter-and-Xerox zine

out of the Bay Area  
promised: the Rime of the Fucked-Up Flatmate, with endless verses. The stories mostly end up revealing the obsessive frustration of the storytellers, each a domestic Dostoevsky with a sense of betrayal and a sinkful of moldering dishes. Send \$2 to Jeff, 1549 Sanborn Ave., San Jose, CA 95110. J.C.

## DIGITAL

### Courier Crisis

(GT Interactive Software)

While messengers' reckless disregard for the people who cross their paths could make for an appealingly twisted homicidal adventure, the object of *Courier Crisis* is, sadly, merely to deliver the goods, not run



over ped. Without carnage, the game tries for inane humor (cyclists can flip off cops), but let's face it: Unless you're pocketing a couple of Benjamins a day, hauling Jiffy Packs isn't much of a rush. DAVID KUSHNER

### Frogger

(Hasbro Interactive)

Riding the video nostalgia wave, Hasbro has resurrected a lame '80s arcade hit and turned it into a '90s CD-ROM. The object is as simple as ever: Hop Kermit over logs and highways and avoid becoming pâté de frog grá. Why did the toad cross the road? To get out of this dopey game. D.K.

### Find a Grave

(www.findagrave.com)

Going boldly beyond the final frontier of celebrity worship, Find a Grave maps out hundreds of celebrity tomb sites across the globe. The lack of a search engine is a major headache, but the site does feature plenty of headstone snapshots that detail the goofy stuff fans leave behind, such as the baseball bat on Babe Ruth's eternal mound. D.K.



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ASSEMBLY LINE

## Hell-Bent for Feathers

Why did heavy-metal godfather Rob Halford come out?

It was to be just another interview to promote a new project. But when 46-year-old ex-Judas Priest singer Rob Halford spoke with MTV News this spring, he uttered those difficult words for the first time: "As a gay man.... Here was Beavis and Butt-head's hero—a veteran headbanger who'd brought the hell-bent-for-leather look to heavy metal—saying he'd been gay his entire life. Suddenly, a news segment about his industrial-rock duo Two turned into a gay-pride proclamation that was quickly picked up by the rest of the media. After spending the better part of the decade toiling away in flops, Halford was in the spotlight once again.

In the *Ellen* era, a new damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't model has emerged for gay performers. If you stay in the closet, you are considered a coward. If you come out, this very personal and difficult act is often interpreted as a publicity stunt. You can certainly look at Halford's announcement as hype for an album that might alienate his old fans and would have a hard time finding new ones without a little assistance. (Despite bad reviews upon its March release, Two's debut, *Voyeurs*, slid onto the *Billboard* 200 at No. 176.) Just last year, the then-closeted singer balked when his friends in the queercore band Pansy Division offered to

**Tougher than leather: Rob Halford of Two.**  
Interview him for the Advocate, a gay magazine. "He came out because his moment is over, because it doesn't matter what he is now," says one hard-rock insider.

Halford is adamant that careerist ambition had nothing to do with his decision. He says his wake-up call came in the form of a recent profile on the reconstituted Judas Priest in a German magazine, which queried his former bandmates on his sexuality. Because the subject had never been publicly discussed, his old friends kept the code of silence. Halford says he realized he couldn't perpetuate the lie any longer: "All this stuff had been boiling up inside me and it just came pouring out of me [on MTV]. I didn't know anyone in metal who was gay. It's remarkable how adept people can be at cloaking themselves in secrecy when their safety is threatened."

Halford, who signed to Trent Reznor's Nothing label in late '97, says it's much easier to be himself in industrial circles, which have always included gays. With its modern-savage-in-a-disco, male-bonding sensibility, industrial rock is even more boy-centric than the metal world Halford helped to homoeroticize. "Halford's coming out has a lot to do with him discovering the queerness of '90s hard rock," says Steven Blush, publisher of *Seconds*, referring to a milieu in which straight acts like Marilyn Manson and the Red Hot Chili Peppers appropriate drag and other gay-culture signifiers.

While lesbian artists Melissa Etheridge and k.d. lang found their sales skyrocketing after coming out, such frankness has historically been a major risk for male musicians working outside of the gay dance ghetto. Although it's been nearly 30 years since David Bowie and Lou Reed flaunted fay ways they later disingenuously disowned, big-time out male rockers are still a rarity. In 1995, Extra Fancy—a tipped-for-the-top L.A. hard-rock outfit with a queer lead singer—signed with Atlantic Records, which has a special gay marketing division. When the band was dropped just a few months after the release of their debut, *Sinnerman*, a slew of industry articles speculated that the frontman's sexuality was in fact a "problem."

"Ten years ago, coming out would have been the last thing a celebrity would do to draw attention to his or her work," says Michelangelo Signori, the writer/activist who brought the term "outing" into common usage. "Halford's experience shows that this issue can now be dealt with in the

most macho pockets of our culture."

"Gay acceptance has so far mostly benefited straight people," counters Daniel Harris, author of *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*. "We're in this strange transitional period when straight can be in gay-themed movies and be seen as compassionate, while homosexual performers are expected to appeal exclusively to a gay-ghetto audience." However, when MTV did a follow-up show on fan reaction—straight, gay, metalhead, whatever—to Halford's sexuality, it was nearly all positive.

Meanwhile, Two filmed their first video, "I Am a Pig," with porn director/drag queen Chi Chi LaRue. So were all those leather-daddy outfits of yore expression of Halford's own sexual tastes? "I was simply trying to find a visual expression of the music," Halford says. "I'm just not a particularly sexually driven person. I'd rather put on a dirty video and have a ween. Or a cup of tea and a biscuit." BARRY WALTERS

## In the Studio

Beck will not release the follow-up to 1996's *Odeley* on his major label, DGC, but on Bongload Records, the tiny Los Angeles-based label that saved him from the indiehouse circuit by releasing "Lover" as a single. Beck's contract allows him to record albums on India ink and stroboscopic film, which he referred to *One Foot in the Grave* on K Records in 1994. So far, the only song on the album is that it will be produced by Nigel Godrich (Radiohead's *OK Computer*). In the meantime, Beck will release an EP of remixes, B sides, and several new songs for Geffen in late summer.... Hip-hop soul man D'Angelo took an experimental approach to the



D'Angelo

follow-up to his platinum 1995 debut, *Brown Sugar*. The self-produced *Voodoo*, due to be released by fall, features the versatile singer also doing triple-duty on keyboards, drums, and bass. "All the songs are really long and we're keeping the mistakes," D'Angelo says. "It's partly a rebellion against business-minded record execs, but it's also what comes naturally to me." Cameos on the record include Fugees Launry Hill and trumpeter Roy Hargrove. JULIA CHAPLIN

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# The Niche Is Back

Summer package tours get focused

Aside from Snoop Doggy Dogg's armored truck, the most memorable sights at Lollapalooza last summer were the vista of empty seats. The former summer-package-tour powerhouse grossed \$9.4 million in 1997, compared to nearly \$27 million in 1994. Eclectic Lollapalooza imitators H.O.R.D.E. and ROAR were equal disappointments. With 11 festivals glutting the market, only those tours that tapped a highly specific niche fared well, including the monsters-of-metal Ozzfest, the female-powered Lilith Fair, and the Vans Warped Tour, which catered to the extreme sport/skate set. "It's become next to impossible to promote large eclectic tours like Lollapalooza because the market has become so fragmented," says Gary Bongiovanni, editor-in-chief of

concert industry journal *Polarstar*. "Let's face it," adds H.O.R.D.E. tour director Heidi Kelsa. "At our event, Primus fans didn't want to hang out with the older Neil Young crowd all afternoon. And many Young fans just stayed home and waited to catch him when he toured alone in the fall."

This year, most promoters consider take-no-chances micro-marketing the only way to make a decent buck. Korn, which dropped off last summer's Lollapalooza halfway into the schedule, will cater to their hard-rock brethren with their own "Family Values" tour (Oryg, Limp Bizkit) this fall. The Warped Tour will continue to ride the ska/punk craze with headliners Rancid, Deftones, the Specials, and NOFX. Round two of the Lilith Fair will feature founder Sarah McLachlan on all dates, plus Paula

Cole, Shawn Colvin, and Missey Elliott. H.O.R.D.E., which strayed from its earthy-crunchy mission last year in favor of Beck, has "returned to its roots" by bringing back original headliner Blues Traveler.

Meanwhile, Lollapalooza was hard-pressed to sign *any* headliner. Garbage opted for a solo tour, as did Green Day. Perhaps Lolla's boot-camp rep scared them off. Prodigy, which played select Lollapalooza dates last summer, considered it a "grueling experience," says Prodigy booking agent Gerry Gerrard. Also rejected by Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, Scott Weiland, and Jane's Addiction, the tour's organizers announced the show will not go on.

On the electronics front, last year's unsuccessful raves-on-wheels Big Top and Electric Highway Tour won't see second seasons. Instead, dance promoters are trying to duplicate the European model with gigantic one-off festivals. There may be an American

version of England's annual Tribal Gathering in September, and Mean Fiddler, the promoters behind the U.K.'s Reading Festival, are planning a Stateside sister event. "As we saw last summer, America is not ready for a full-length electronic tour," says Mean Fiddler's U.S. partner Joe Kellian.

But even with such updated strategizing, there's still no guarantee the crowds will come. "This summer's festivals should be stronger than last year, as more have narrowed their focus," says *Polarstar*'s Bongiovanni. "Then again, there are still many more than the public can support." (J.C.)



Hey, Paula: Show us your pits!

## HUSH HUSH

The monthly dish on the music biz

Like some last-minute reprieve from the governor, West Coast rap kingpin Snoop Doggy Dogg has seemingly been spared a further stay on Death Row by the indie grace (and muscle) of Master P's No Limit Records, which plans to release Snoop's next album, *Do Damage to Be Sold, Not to Be Told*, on August 4. Snoop's reasons for wanting off Death Row are clear: The financially ruined label's CEO, Suge Knight, is serving ten and a half years in a California prison, and the chances of Death Row being able to afford and promote a new Snoop album are nil. Snoop has made no attempt to hide his dissatisfaction with Knight, publicly accusing Death Row of withholding royalty payments and publishing funds. One rival executive says the move to No Limit reclaims for Snoop some badly needed street cred: "It hurts everybody in the 'hood when they see Snoop struggling."

Those in attendance at March's No Limit show in Houston, where Master P introduced a No Limit-gear-bedeviled Snoop as the "newest member of the No Limit family," said the merger of the two rap icons has the flavor of a revival. But undermining all that good feeling is a very unclear situation with Death Row (which holds that Snoop is still under contract), not to mention the murky atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and bloodshed that has surrounded Death Row and Knight. While some predict that the deal will go down without much drama, an attorney close to the situation doubts a deal even exists and predicts that the coming weeks will be filled with various legal somersaults. Cells



Who's got Game?: Snoop Doggy Dogg, above, enlists with No Limit Records.

Whither Tito: The J5, right, ponder a reunion.



to Death Row seeking comment went unanswered....

It seems there's just nothing like being added to the playlist at Modern Rock powerhouse KROQ to convince a label of a band's long-term artistic vision. And so, only seconds after the L.A.-based station put Orange County reggae-ska-punk kids Wank into rotation, the bidding war for the song, er, band kicked into high gear, with five labels vying and Maverick priding vitriolous. So what's a band to do? If you're thinking kickin' down a little wall to see if you're tall? Well, nothing really. But just as with much passed-over Czech, which caught the ear of labels after mushy spinnage at Tallahassee's KOME, no A&R weasels were exercising their vesselly rights until it was clear there was radio support for the song, er, band....

Rumors of a J5 reunion are making industry rounds, as A&R chief Matt McClain signs in as acting manager for Jackie during the making of his new Sony project.... Jive Records has reportedly purchased the tattered remnants of what was once a label called Zoo or Volcano or Free World depending on the prevailing winds, getting in return the label's Matthew Sweet and Tool catalogs and the ongoing litigation with the Ozzy-bound Tool over whether the label missed a contract option and unwittingly made the band free agents. Should the sale be completed, Jive would seemingly take one of the three positions with Tool: 1) "We've got your catalog and we're continuing litigation"; 2) "We've got your catalog, so let's discuss a settlement"; 3) "We've got your catalog and you're one of those scary rock bands in league with Beelzebul, which frightens Jars of Clay, so see you later." Insider tip: Look for money to be the determining factor. Not Satan. JOE FLEISCHER

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»N

# NATALIE IMBRUGLIA

# THE "TORN" BIRD



When ex-soap dolly Natalie Imbruglia turned an obscure grunge ballad into the year's most unavoidable hit single, she became the latest in an increasingly long line of ingenues to claim instant pop stardom. And, as Kim France learns, to want so much more

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELFIE SEMOTAN

The Prince Edward is a crumbling old deco hotel in Melbourne, Australia, that opens out over the Pacific Ocean. On the second floor, there is a ballroom—low-ceilinged and dark—that has been converted into a rock club where tonight, newly minted pop sensation Natalie Imbruglia is playing an industry showcase. The venue is perfect for Imbruglia—just seedy enough to endow her with a patina of alternative credibility, but not so seedy as to scare off the mainstream record business types (radio joes, retailers, etc.) for whose benefit the evening has been planned. The crowd isn't wholly comprised of blasé professionals—Imbruglia lived in Melbourne when she starred as Beth-the-teen-bride on the soap opera *Neighbours*, and some old friends have turned up to root her on—but it's no love-struck sea of shrieking teenagers, either.

And so there is a hefty portion of tonight's attendees who, maybe aren't so eager to see her succeed: people who assume she's cut from the same cloth as the last *Neighbours* star to make it big in music, Kylie Minogue. The fact that Imbruglia's ascent has been so incredibly fast only fuels suspicions. There are very few corners of Europe and Asia where her doe-eyed swoon of a single, "Torn," has not become a hit. And its progress in America, a market Imbruglia didn't think she was anywhere near ready to conquer, has been astonishing. "Torn" was supposed to be released in the U.S. in March, when the album debuted. But the influential L.A. rock station KROQ started playing the import single in January, and other stations followed, and a decision was made to release it immediately. MTV jacked the video

into heavy rotation. And then, amazingly, Imbruglia (pronounced im-BROO-lee-uh) was invited to perform on *Saturday Night Live*, one of a handful of artists ever to do so before their debut album was released. Appearances on *Letterman* and *Rosie* were cinched. All of which was great, but RCA was hoping for a slightly more gradual build. Something more long-term, and less gaudy. More Tori, less Tiffany.

But it's too late. Like a robot that outsmarts its creator and seizes control of the laboratory, Natalie Imbruglia the product is moving on its own steam. Across the globe in another time zone, it is morning in America, and by the end of the day the charts will reflect that her album, *Left of the Middle*, has debuted at No. 10. Imbruglia won't know this for another 12 hours, though. Right now, she must get her wits about her, head onstage, and play her sixth live show ever. A label functionary doesn't exactly sooth the 23-year-old's nerves by addressing the crowd as though they were unruly sixth graders at a school assembly. "Natalie and the band have come a very long way to play for you tonight," he announces, "so if you're not prepared to stop talking and turn off your mobile phones, please take it outside."

Actually, despite the label's fears, the crowd's behavior throughout is at worst cordial, and at best, especially during "Torn" and the propulsive hits-to-be "Wishing I Was There" and "Big Mistake," positively devoted. But even this hometown audience looks on with an ever-so-slightly-jaded eye. Australia is a nation obsessed with American celebrity culture, and therefore Imbruglia is as notable for having briefly dated a star of *Friends* as she is for starring in *Neighbours* or for



making *Last of the Middle*. Just before the band comes on, a young Australian fan I've been chatting with turns to me, and with a very serious look on her face, says, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Yes."

"Why did Natalie break up with David Schwimmer?"

It's the morning after the show, and Imbruglia—looking very low-affect glam in olive drab cargo pants, black T-shirt, and sunglasses—is wide awake and feeling goofy as she enters the airport minibus with her bandmates. She is just so pretty—even more so in person—and it's that rare kind of beauty that men and women can agree upon, an ever-so-slightly exotic Christy Turlington grace. Her dad is Italian, and she inherited his striking combination of dark skin and light blue eyes. She is as tiny as Natalie Wood, or Madonna, and nicely curvy. Even the features that don't have to be perfect are perfect: Her eyelashes are thick and long; her skin is flawless. In another era, she would have been discovered in a high-school talent show and whisked off to Hollywood for a studio contract.

But actress-cum-singer fuels the dreams of today's female progeny, and Imbruglia's climb to the top is quintessentially now: Pretty girl comes out of nowhere with radio-friendly, professionally administered beats, and a face that knows its way around a camera. A hairdresser comes in and tangles her tresses just so. And a new video queen is crowned. From Lisa Loeb to Jewel, from Alanis to Fiona, even from the Spice Girls to All Saints, each succeeding version becomes more streamlined, more idealized. This may rankle those excessively fond of the get-in-the-van school of rock authenticity, but today's teenagers don't seem to care how their pop stars get here, just so long as they look cute doing so.

One downside of having stardom hatch too early is that the artist's tools may not operate on as high a level as the profile. Such is the case with Imbruglia's voice, which, she explains in a gravelly whisper, blew out last night after the show. As the van pulls out of the hotel driveway, the sweet and borderline-nerdy guys in her band make fun of Imbruglia for acting so crushed-out on one of the guests at the after-party last night, another former *Neighbours* star. "He said, 'I really like the record,'" and I said, "Oh, do you have it?" and he said, "No, but my girlfriend does." Imbruglia makes a face and everyone laughs at her tale of woe. "I thought I was gonna get snogged!" she says with a pout. But it's silly: Though she wears her beauty easily, Imbruglia must be aware that she could snog any guy she wanted.

Which is part of the reason "Torn" has been such a smash. First of all, it is that nearly perfectly perfect pop specimen, a breakup song teenage girls instantly adore and the rest us pretend to hate until we realize we haven't stopped humming it. And it is about that most universal girl experience, the moment when a guy who's made himself all vulnerable and lovestruck backs into his shell and you're left wondering which version of him was real. "You couldn't be that man I adored / You don't seem to know, seem to care what your heart is for," Imbruglia sings in a voice that makes heartbreak seem like the most noble emotion in the world. If there is one thing teenage girls love, it is knowing that pretty girls get their hearts stomped on too.

**B**y Wednesday afternoon, Imbruglia has arrived at the seaside town of Palm Beach, which is to Sydney what Malibu is to L.A.: a star colony just far enough away from the city for the air to clear out a bit; where million-dollar houses are piled up one on top of the other, on a cliff, with an ocean view so exhilarating that one is left with no option but to believe that money can buy too much happiness.

Imbruglia spent her childhood on the beach—"I was a professional sun-baker when I was young," she says—and sometimes, before a show or something stressful, she likes to sit near the water and clear her head. We have walked down a steep path from her friend's house to the water, and are seated at a beachside tofu burger shack, a world away from the pressure-cooker environment of the night before.

She says that she absolutely always knew she wanted to be a performer. "As a kid I thought everybody was born with a blueprint," she says. "I always thought, Isn't it what you're naturally talented at, and making the most of those talents? How can you not be aware of that? I don't mean to be mean, but I just couldn't fathom." She and her three sisters took dance lessons, but none of them were as obsessive about them as Natalie. "I remember there was this girl called Henya Hyland who was at my tap school. She used to get all the solos, and God, I just wanted to be in her position. So every night I would put two planks of wood down in the garage, and I would practice and practice. I did my exercises in bed, thinking 'I've got to get my ankles strong,' she says. At some point, something inside her just clicked, some extra added edge.

Of course she beat out Henya Hyland the next time auditions rolled around. And just as Imbruglia practiced tap until she got it perfect, she's convinced that she'll polish her act enough to be a really good pop star, too. "The only thing I'm lacking is experience, and unfortunately I'm going to have to gain it in public. But



"The only thing I'm lacking is experience, and unfortunately I'm going to have to gain it in public. But better this way than never having success at all!"

better this way than, you know, than never having success at all."

To which Anne Preven, the author and original performer of "Torn," might respond, *Well, yeah*. Preven is the lead singer of Ednaswap, one of the many female-fronted bands signed by major labels in the great alternative gold rush of the early '90s. She wrote "Torn" in 1993 with bandmate Scott Cutler, and two years later, for Ednaswap's debut album on Elektra. That record went nowhere, and Ednaswap left Elektra for Island, where they've so far released an EP and an album, both of which include a second, radically reworked version of "Torn" (there's even a third Ednaswap version, a sweetened last-ditch "radio mix"). Of the three, it's the EP/LP take that's most affecting, as well as most emblematic of the changing musical times: There, Preven's "Torn" is a full-on grunge ballad, all wails and aches, and when Preven sings that she is torn, she sounds like she is torn as in ripped wide open, exposed and bleeding—as opposed to torn between staying and going, which is how Imbruglia sings it.

Preven is philosophical about having "Torn" fluffed up and toned down for a pretty young soap star; after all, she and her bandmates tried everything short of a Puffy Remix to break it on radio, and the song, she recognizes, has a life all its own. "Torn" has been recorded by an American based in Norway named Trine Rein, a Dutch girl named Lis Sorensen, and scores of others who have made demos of it, all under the tutelage of Thomalla. It has been recorded so often that, as Preven jokes, "you could make a 12-song album and call it *Torn*."

The song's provenance was blown up into a big fat quasi-scandal in the U.K., where tabloids accused Imbruglia of trying to take credit for it, something she insists she would never do. "Torn" was unknown in most places, Imbruglia says, her voice taking on a clipped, pissed-off quality for the first time. "So why was I going to say, 'Oh, and by the way, this song that you haven't heard yet. Has been done by some girl you haven't heard of?'" She is tired of answering questions about it—she's got other songs, after all, ones she wrote. But for now, she is stuck where she's been for the past few months, explaining "Torn" to yet another journalist.

**P**hil Thornalley, who should know, thinks the key to Imbruglia's "Torn" is its "vulnerability, something maybe more universal." And though Imbruglia did not write the words herself, when she sings "I am cold and I am shamed / Lying naked on the floor," it does indeed sound as if she knows what she's talking about, because when she first sang that song, she was going through maybe the most trying period of her young life.

It was the summer of 1996 and she had been living in London since she'd quit

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Dream girl: An acting career is practically a prerequisite in today's pop sweepstakes.

The triumph of "Torn" proves that, if there is one thing that teenage girls love, it's knowing that pretty girls get their hearts stomped on too

**N**eighbours two years earlier. She didn't have a work visa, which didn't bother her at first, because she wanted to dress up and go to clubs more than anything, but all the partying got old really fast. Even worse, she was running out of money, and her visa was about to expire, which meant she would have to return home in order to come back. Faced for the first time in her life with an uncertain future, her perfectionist side kicked in, and she decided she needed to leave with some kind of career plan in place. She'd offers to be a TV hostess, but what she really wanted to do was sing and write songs, and though she'd been told that she sang well, she was too embarrassed to pursue it. "I'd been on a soap," she says, "and it wasn't very cool to talk about the fact that I was a singer."

She did, however, meet with Mark Fox, former percussionist for Haircut 100 who was at the time creative director of BMG Publishing. He knew the moment was right for a girl like Imbruglia—fresh-faced yet with showbiz know-how under her belt—to hit as a pop act. Fox had worked with actors-turned-singers before, and he was "aware of the possibility that actors can do other things besides just act. It was clear to me," he says, "that acting was the thing Imbruglia had fallen into, not singing."

Fox instantly thought of his friend Phil Thornalley, and called him to say he'd met a girl who'd be perfect for "Torn." So Imbruglia recorded a demo with Thornalley, and then met her future manager, Anna Barrett, an intense Scotswoman who had guided the career of Betty Boo, a girl rapper who for a few brief months in the early '90s was being typed as the next Madonna. Imbruglia played Barret the tape she'd made with Thornalley, and Barrett knew instantly that Imbruglia was destined for stardom. "When I first heard Natalie sing 'Brass in Pocket,'" she says.

So, armed with the Thornalley demos and some 8" x 10" glossies, Barrett met with BMG exec Jeremy Marsh. "A few bars in, he was jumping up and down," Barrett says. "RCA didn't have any act of this sort, whereas A&M had Sheryl Crow and Suzanne Vega, and Warner Bros. had Alanis Morissette. [They] had in actual fact been looking for a Natalie for the past six months." It was Imbruglia's great fortune that everyone was looking for an Alanis that year, and her even better fortune that two years later, Alanis has yet to deliver another album.

**T**he credits on *Left of the Middle* tip off the record's true identity: a state-of-the-art pop product with as many cowriters, producers, and collaborators as a Hollywood movie or a Mase album. Imbruglia shares writing credit on ten of *Left of the Middle*'s 12 songs; ten other people besides Imbruglia receive writing or production credit on the album. Most notable among them: Thornalley;

Nigel Godrich, producer of Radiohead's *OK Computer*, who mixed much of the record; and Mark Goldenberg, an LA songwriter who penned "Novocaine for the Soul" for the Eels and worked with Imbruglia on a batch of songs, including the plucky "Big Mistake." The triptych of singles to be released from *Left of the Middle*—"Torn," bittersweet and wounded; "Wishing I Was Here," a super-bouncy Hanson rip; and "Big Mistake," an alt-iah kiss-off à la Alanis's "You Oughta Know"—are expert examples of late-'90s pop architecture, brilliantly if clinically designed songs certain to fill the air at beaches and Sweet Sixteens all summer long. *Left of the Middle* may not be a sublime version of assembly-line pop as Motown, or Madonna, or even Alanis, but if you don't scratch the surface too hard you'll come away with a nice little sugar high.

Imbruglia is very proud of the finished album; proud she asserted herself with all those intimidating boy producers, and that her identity didn't get totally squashed along the way. Even if, she admits, that identity was not always clear even to her. "When I worked with people, I'd say, 'I don't want to do cheesy pop.' And they'd say, 'What do you want to sound like?' And I'd say, 'I want to sound like me.' And they'd say, 'What's you?' And I'd say, 'I don't know yet, help me find out.'"

Imbruglia's story, and the story of "Torn," is more than just the latest pop fable, though: It is also a poignant reminder of how the female voice in pop music has, over the course of a few short years, gone from a whisper to a scream and then back to a whisper. Not that long ago, there was an armful of female-fronted bands united not so much by anger as by a shared spirit of rebellion. Veruca Salt, the Breeders, Hole, and even Elastica were all at least slightly threatening to your average guy (which doesn't take much; just the image of a girl playing electric guitar is slightly threatening to your average guy). There was something sexy and subversive about women playing together in a band, something exhilarating to a generation raised to believe that only guys could turn up to 11.

The problem was, it wasn't exhilarating to enough people. So when Alanis Morissette sold more records than all those groups put together, the music industry retreated and looked again to sign singers, not bands. Whatever skills they lacked could be fixed in the studio. Morissette worked an edge and an anger, but most of those who followed lacked even that. They were young, vulnerable girls, pretty as you please, with unplugged guitars—when they played an instrument at all. And, as the Anne Prevens of the world know all too well, hurt and vulnerable trumps angry and vulnerable any day.

**N**atalie Imbruglia is lying on the sand, on a beach towel, looking at a copy of *New Idea* megazine, which is sort of an Australian cross between the *Star* and *Good Housekeeping*. She flips to a story about Tommy and Pamela Lee's big bust-up, and I point to Pamela and ask Imbruglia where she's planning on getting that done. "Do you mean the drunk look on her face or the fake boobs?" she asks. The boobs, I tell her. "Nope. Never. Don't need to go there..." She glances at the cover story on Nicole Kidman's wardrobe, and an exposé on Elle Macpherson's sister's new mystery beau. Then she lands on a two-page spread with the headline **THE GIRL WHO GROW UP TO BE A STAR!**

"Look at this picture!" she gasps, pointing to herself at age 14, after a dance recital. Her hair is pulled back in a ponytail. Her lips are glossy as chrome. "Oh. My. God. Check out my mouth. It's massive! Eew, it looks like someone punched me in the face." She reads from the story's first sentence: "She grew up to become a *Neighbours* star, then the famous girlfriend...uhhhh..." she groans, and stops reading elowr, for the next words are "...of friends star David Schwimmer." She finishes the story in a sub-whisper, interjecting comments along the way. When she reads that "Torn" "was offered to Natalie by its composer, who didn't think to tell the young Aussie star that someone had already recorded a version in Norway," she reacts by saying, "They *did* tell me, you bastard. Oh, they just lie..." She reads a few more lines and finds a touch of fury in her voice. "And I never said Elvis didn't write any of his songs. I didn't even know that. I said, 'Tina Turner has done pretty well for herself performing other people's songs.'"

Imbruglia longs for the day when these questions of authorship and album credits stop dogging her. In a recent story, she spoke with admiration and envy of Shawn Colvin, saying she was afraid even to compare her talent to that of the older, more seasoned singer/songwriter. It is pointed out that Colvin's career trajectory could not differ more dramatically from her own; that the 42-year-old Colvin just this year earned her first platinum album; that she has toured tirelessly for a decade and a half and never enjoyed the perks of being anointed a *Next Big Thing*. "Wow," Imbruglia says, staring out to sea, and for a moment, one gets the impression she wouldn't mind trading places. "That's the real McCoy, isn't it?" \*

Additional reporting by Victoria DeSilverio



Of all the lead singers we've had, most never got enough calcium. Typical. But not for Alex and me. Because every time we change singers, we have an extra glass of milk.

That way we're sure to get more than the recommended three glasses a day. As you can see, sometimes all at once.

**MILK**

Where's your mustache?

ALEX AND EDDIE VAN HALEN © 1997 NATIONAL FLUID MILK PROCESSOR PROMOTION BOARD

# DEEP IN THE JEEPS OF TEXAS

Houston, we have a mogul: Suave House's more-is-more CEO Tony Draper is making sure nobody sleeps on Southern hip-hop. Zev Borow rolls deep

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC JOHNSON



Here in my car: Tony Draper in his mobile office.

**W**hat is the sound of one man pimpin'? Tony Draper cruising at 110 MPH in his brand new BMW 740 along one of the empty freeways that snake through Houston. That and some base—a lot of bass.

"You know I pimp in my car," says Draper, the 26-year-old founder and CEO of Suave House Records. "In this town, you got to." If it takes 20 minutes to get anywhere in L.A., it takes 30 in Houston. Of course, there's hardly any traffic, potholes are nonexistent, and the closest things to hills are on-ramps. The result is long, smooth drives that beg for grotesquely sophisticated car stereo systems. Simply put, you haven't rolled 'til you've rolled in Houston. And you haven't rolled in Houston 'til you've rolled with Tony Draper.

"I spend more time in my car than most muhfuckas," he says. "I only listen to music in my car. I can't really feel shit if I don't hear it while I'm driving. Hell, there ain't a problem in the world I can't figure out on the freeway at 2 A.M."

At 2 A.M. this particular morning, though, Draper is relatively problem-free. A few hours earlier, his rappers Eightball & MJG played to nearly 14,000 rabid fans at a sold-out concert at Houston's Summit Arena headlined by No Limit Records general Mester P. After the show, the MCs ushered Draper onstage and presented

him with a plaque honoring him for being both "Bout It" and a "Maja Playa." Even better, currently pulsating out of his Beemer's state-of-the-art sound system is an early mix of Eightball's solo record, *Lost*, a triple-CD gargantua set for release this month. Featuring guest raps from Puff Daddy, Busta Rhymes, Ice Cube, and nearly every other major figure in hip-hop, it may be just the record to shift the rap world's focus to Texas and, as Draper says, "finally make niggas everywhere stop asking, 'Who the fuck is Tony Draper?'"

Not that it's an unfair question. Truth is, the critical and consumer masses centered on both coasts really don't know who Draper and Eightball are. Not only is Suave House based in the rap province of Houston, but for most of its six-year existence it has been an independent label, one that has enjoyed neither the fruits of a national marketing/distribution machine nor the helping hand of MTV. Still, bolstered by sporadic regional radio play and trunkloads of underground cred, Draper's crew (which also includes Thorough and the R&B crooner Rodney Ellis) has sold millions of records throughout the South. (Eightball & MJG's 1995 release, *On Top of the World*, sold more than 60,000 copies in Texas, but less than 3,000 in New York City.) Like heavy metal in the '80s, electronica in the early '90s





## "Eightball is just real good people, like the niggas you grew up with"

Will Eightball be the bomb?: It is decidedly so.

before it became a red-dot special at Wal-Mart, and, most recently, the mega-platinum reality rap of the No Limit posse, Suave House's success is the result of tireless grassroots promotion.

But the stakes are about to be raised. At a time when most major-label conglomerates are shying away from hardcore rap, Universal recently inked a multi-million-dollar distribution deal with Suave House. ("Tony can't miss," says Universal CEO Doug Morris.) This situation will finally give Suave House the ability to disseminate its sound, "says Thembiso Msheka, rap editor for the radio industry journal *Gavin*. "Lost is going to do well because, although it is a slow, riding

### CONFEDERACY OF FUNKSTAS The history of Southern hip-hop

When Bronx-born University of Miami student Erik Amaro called out for the Big Apple homage "Deja Vu" at a campus club last year, he was completely unprepared for the reaction he got—a fight that resulted in five stiches and the arrest of a Hurricanes football player. "They were telling me to kill that New York shit, that we're No Limit soldiers down here," Amaro says. "I knew Master P was big, but..."

No, there's no new East Coast/Southeast beef, but the incident does underline the massive popularity of Southern hip-hop. Overlooked in the New York/Celi hip-hop equation, the

South has quietly arisen as a major commercial and artistic nexus, home to hot labels such as No Limit (New Orleans) and LaFace (Atlanta) and such major artists as Scarface, Goodie Mob, Luther Campbell, and Timbaland. "With all these folks blowing up,



2 Live Crew

record, it's also got this energetic bounce-drum pattern, and commercial radio demands a higher BPM."

Or, as Draper puts it, "There are a whole lot of black people down South who are tired of listening to shout-outs to Brooklyn and Compton. Southern niggas want some shit that's their own." By catering directly to that fan base, Suave House has established itself as one of the best-selling, least-known forces in hip-hop, and Draper as the potential king of Houston's vibrant rap scene. Combine a Texan's can-do bigger-is-better personality with a ghetto kid's street-smart swagger, throw in some down-home, easygoing charm and good ol' Southern eccentricity, and you've only scratched the surface of Draper's manic charisma. "Tony's the most more-is-more motherfucker alive," says one Suave House employee. "When you're around him, you can't help but feel it."

**R**olling deep with Tony Draper pretty much goes like this: First he'll pick you up in one of his many cars. Probably the Range Rover or the Navigator, possibly the BMW, but almost certainly not the Corvette or the custom-colored (sorta burgundy) Dodge Viper with twin speakers built into the hood. Then you'll drive around while he talks on his cell phone. "I don't believe in spending my days in an office behind a desk," he says. No, he believes in spending his days crisscrossing Houston, listening to the city's leading rap/R&B station, the Box (97.9) when he gets his "creativity juices flowing." That might also include afternoon movies, playing basketball ("My game is like a combination of Michael Jordan's and Magic Johnson's"), and pumping local arcades full of quarters.

But mostly he just mans his cell phone, conducting business while breaking minor traffic laws. Not something you'd expect from someone with a severe stutter, which, combined with his Southern drawl and light-speed conversational style, makes understanding him a challenge. Lunch is around 4 P.M., usually at Benihana. Yes, Benihana. ("I like that they put my picture up on the wall," Draper says. "It's pretty close to Charles Barkley's.") In the early evening, he visits his two children by his longtime girlfriend. Then it's out for more food (often at Benihana again), and maybe over to Celigula XI, one of Houston's ubiquitous strip clubs. Draper, who doesn't drink, smoke, or get high, seems to know most of the women, but shows more interest in video poker.

Around 1 A.M., he heads over to the Suave House studio, a homeboy paradise complete with pool tables, full-court basketball, and two large TVs outfitted with Sony PlayStations. The only house rule is scrawled on a sign taped to the door of the room with the costliest recording equipment: NO BLINTS INSIDE. NO DRINKS ON THE MIXER. YOU FOOLS—it's MY MONEY!—DRAPER. Tonight, as Eightball works on his new album, it is indeed a good thing that the man with the money is also the only non-high person in the room. "Hey, Ball," he says, "you got a name for that last track yet?"

"Nah, I don't want this one to be just another name, y'know?"

"Just be serious. Don't laugh. And try to finish some of this shit tonight. Ball, you hear me?"

"The best thing about Tony," Eightball says later, "is that you know he's looking out for you. Shit, Tony's the type of dude who shows you, not tells you, what you can have if you really put your mind to it and work."

Not quite 5'4" and easily 250 pounds, Eightball is roundly in the mold of a Biggie-like rap star. Quick with a grin, and graced with textbook-polite Southern manners, Ball shuns the gilded trappings of hip-hop, kicking it in nondescript sweats rather than Versace. ("He's just real good people, like the niggas you grew

it's not like who is from the South anymore," says Lurch of West Coast crew Cosmic Stop Shop. "It's like who isn't."

Hip-hop's Southernization has been gradual, a shift in sensibility as much as a shift in geographics. Much of the region's early '80s contributions—Miami Bass, for example—betrayed the heavy Northern influence of beatmakers such as Afrika Bambaataa. The B-boy roots of Atlanta's So So Def CEO Jermaine Dupri include dancing on 1984's "Fresh Fest" tour for Run-D.M.C. In the late '80s, however, Houston's controversial Geto Boys gave their classic hip-hop influences a deep South, country blues

spin. Their 'round-the-way vocal inflections symbolically made clear that "It was okay to be Southern," as Rico Wade of Atlanta's Organized Noize production crew says. A succession of top-selling Southern acts followed: Afro-bohos Arrested Development, kiddie popsters Kris Kross, booty-shakers Tag Team and 69 Boyz, hip-hop RB stars TLC.

By the time Master P's No Limit



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up with," says one longtime friend.) "Just kicking back and cruising is a big part of the sound down here," says Ball, absentmindedly stroking the shocker on his chin with one hand, and holding a blunt in the other. "Our beats are slower 'cause our lives are slower. Wu-Teng shit is like rushing on-the-sidewalk music. The majority of my new album is laid-back, slow, real jazzy, lots of bass for rolling."

Originally from Tennessee, Eightball and his partner MJG met Draper six years ago at a Memphis talent show. Draper made the nine-hour drive from Houston every weekend, until he finally persuaded the duo to record for him. Though Eightball has lived in Texas for nearly five years now, he says he's still heavily influenced by Memphis music. "I grew up listening to a lot of Al Green," Ball recalls. "And my mom used to listen to a lot of blues. Even now, when I'm chilling and relaxing just to myself, that's still the shit I listen to."

Such influences are all over *Lost*, practically a Southern rap primer with its de rigueur faux-oxymoron spoken-word intros, southern R&B hooks, and odes to play life. But Ball's easy, natural flow is undeniable, and the all-star lineup yields some gems, including the Busta Rhymes collaboration "Get Money," which features the guitar riff from INXS's "Need You Tonight." Ball even flirts with social commentary at times, mainly the yin and yang of growing up black in the cradle of the civil rights movement. And, of course, the beats do sound extra dope in a car.

While the album was being mixed, New York's making DJ Funkmaster Flex flew down to Houston to kick it with Suave House. Soon, Ball was in New York joking with Flex on his top-rated radio show on the city's flagship Hot 97. "I've always known about those guys, but I had to go down there and vibe with them and really feel it," says Flex. "People in New York and L.A. just have to be exposed to new stuff. I think it's a record that's going to break all over."

First, though, it will break in Houston, where hip-hop's traditional regionalism is over-the-top. The story of Houston rap is one of controversial hero-covers the Gato Boyz arising from the poverty-stricken Fifth Ward in the '80s to wonder, "Why Do We Live This Way?" They and their label, James Smith's legendary Rap-A-Lot Records, spent most of the next decade in constant conflict with the police, right-wing censors, and the larger African-American community. Gato Boy Willie D. even released a solo single called "Rodney K (Fuck Rodney King)."

But in recent years, the political and social climate has become increasingly melting-pot. Re-migration from California and the North has created a sizable black middle class. In 1997, Houston—which is 28 percent black—elected its first African-American mayor, and recently passed a referendum supporting affirmative action. The city is now considered to be a black music haven that will eventually be comparable to Atlanta. Indeed, the tight-knit rap scene has grown steadily over the past five years, bolstered by the arrival of labels such as Suave House and Wreck Shop, and a large contingent of independent record stores devoted to promoting hometown artists. When Fat Pat, a minor local MC, was murdered this winter, The Box put him in heavy rotation; Box DJ Mad Hatter served as a pallbearer.

In Houston, rap is very much about "black music made by and for black people," proving fertile soil for what Draper calls "the shit that makes the 'hood bounce"—music that, like a lot of early West Coast rap, is as much about sensibility as sound, and springs to the top of the charts from what seems like nowhere. If current hip-hop can be split into three camps: poppy (Puff); intellectual (Vυ-Teng Clan, Kool Keith); and street (Silkk the Shocker, Scarface, Snoop), Suave House is certifiably street, filling the gap left by the demise of Deeth Row.

But while Dr. Dre is a visionary producer, music is almost an afterthought in the

Mester P reality rap model, which is more concerned with outrageous imagery and a bucking-the-system frisson. As a result, the subgenre has been long ignored or maligned by the hip-hop intelligentsia, which dismisses it as artless, unsophisticated "hootchie jams." However, as Gov't's Mshaka notes, ringing cash registers have a way of changing people's minds. "A lot of Southern rap hasn't gotten much respect in the past. Even now, the line between genuine acceptance and being commercially coerced into acceptance is blurred. But New York has no choice. Southern rap is banging, it's everywhere and, quiet as it's kept, New York likes it, too." Adds Draper, "Niggas from the rest of the country might not realize the type of love someone like Eightball gets down South. But they will. It's only a matter of time."

**T**ony Draper is rolling through some of his former neighborhoods, mostly grim projects and other low-income enclaves. Playing tour guide, he gestures toward sentimental points of interest: neighbors' lawns he used to mow, places he was robbed. "Once got jumped there for \$20 and ten drumsticks," he says, pointing to a small soul-food stand. "You know that's some straight ghetto shit." His teenage sons included cooking "mean-sass pasta" at The Olive Garden and glazing ham. Draper managed his first rap group while still in high school, and single-handedly started Suave House in 1992 with \$1000. He was 20.

"Growing up, I fucked around like everybody else, stealing bikes, hustling any way I could," he says. "But when I hit 17, I was like, this ain't juvin' shit anymore, and I wasn't about to go to jail. I need about black-owned shit like Rap-A-Lot and Def Jam, and started to concentrate on music."

Now Draper lives in a predominantly white gated community nestled in a Houston suburb called Sugarland. His gray, fortress-like home is immaculately clean and tastefully Texas. (The five-foot-tall elephant tusks that command the living room somehow work.) Really, Draper doesn't appear to struggle with the demons that haunts some of his hip-hop contemporaries. Perhaps he's learned from their mistakes, picking and choosing among the best qualities of Puffy, Suge Knight, and Master P. He places little stock in maintaining a hard image, taking pride in both his ghetto past and his seemingly too squeaky-clean present. In this post-Biggie era, it's an attitude that's street-smart as it is commercially savvy.

"Nobody really has any beef with Tony," says Mo' Better, a local promoter. "He's pretty much straight with everybody, even the police." Draper hires off-duty officers as Suave House security, and plays basketball every Thursday night at the police headquarters' gym. "You even think about pulling over one of my boys and I promise you ain't scoring tonight," Draper jokes one such evening. "The thing about Tony is he knows how to do things the right way," an officer wheezes during a mid-game break. Driving home from the gym (the Range Rover), Draper says, "I guess there was a time I never thought I'd be belling with cops, but shit—I ain't stupid. Sometimes you're hellraiser but you've got some friends on the force."

Hops in a truly nasty mix tape from the local Blast record store. "Did I tell you these tapes were the best? Best in all of Houston, best in the whole country!" Quite the civic booster, Draper stipulates that every Suave House artist live in Houston during the recording process because, "It's harder for niggas to lose focus and get in trouble down here than in New York or L.A." But he also says he wants to do more business in those coastal Babylons.

"I'm trying to build something," he says. "I want Suave House to be more than just a rap label. I don't see any reason why I can't make it happen." Mora is more—just the way he likes it. ■



Arrested Development Records finished counting its 1997 loot—four platinum-plus albums and two gold ones, the Southern sound had infiltrated the mainstream so completely that

Southern, Western, and Midwestern artists all started to sound like blood relatives. If other '90s superstars weren't Southern, they damn sho' sounded like it. Too Short? Snoop Dogg? Sheezy? Bone Thugs-N-

Harmony? They sound so Southern, Memphis's Three 6 Mafia accused them of biting their style.

The rise of Southern rap coincides with African-American "re-migration"—Northerners and Californians heading for the slower pace and lower rents below the Mason-Dixon line. Atlanta and Houston are prime destinations for this '90s homestead shift, one that reverses the South-to-North trend that had been the rule for the first half of the 20th century. "The East and the West are like two pieces of bread, and the South is the meat," says James Smith of Houston's Rap-A-Lot Records. "We

are where everybody comes from." And increasingly goes back to.

What's so special about Southern rap? For one thing, it's funkier, drawing



Mester P

heavily on soul and greasy spangadelica, with live instrumentation often carrying the beat home. Even when charged up to the proto-jungle levels of Southeastern bass, it never fails to make your backbone slip. Raps are often more plainspoken and tale-oriented than most East Coast styles, reflecting the narrative tradition of the blues.

But any thumbnail sketch is rife with contradiction because the music is so stunningly diverse. "I don't consider my sound 'South,'" says Timbaland. "We just do whatever is dope." TONY GREEN

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# HERE COMES THE SON

What becomes a legacy most? For 22-year-old Sean Lennon,  
it's making beautiful underground music that  
would make any mom and dad proud. by Eric Weisbard

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TERRY RICHARDSON

**W**hat gets you immediately is his resemblance to Drew Barrymore, another child celebrity who's had to survive a great lineage laced with tragedy. In his record company bio, he calls it his "positive sunshine vibe." They both gush, relentlessly optimistic, indulging preposterous banter, glittery and psychedelic. Punk rock wasn't enough for the rage they inherited; only the widest-eyed smile, the most encompassing embrace of any and all, could soothe that churning. "Overcoming fear of strangers," Sean Lennon says, "has been one of the greatest tasks of my life. Every time my mom walked into the Dakota I would walk behind her, just in case somebody shot me—I would take the

Yoko Ono's son might actually be cool is too enticing to resist. And now here he is, Sean Lennon, with his first album, *Intro Personal*, released on Grand Royal, the Beasties Boys' personal label. How cool is that?

Pretty cool, but let's make a distinction. Sean Lennon is less a sonic adventurer skin to the Beasties Boys than a really, really big Beastie Boys fan. Like many an alternatyre, he reveres the trinity: Nirvana, the Beasties, and Beck. Framed Jane's Addiction and Butthole Surfers posters hang in the SoHo warehouse where we meet, the warehouse his parents used for experimental films and which Lennon now employs as rehearsal and demo space. Later that week he'll play New York wearing the same Beck T-shirt you probably bought.

Of course, there are differences between him and your with-it older sib. When Lennon first heard Jimi Hendrix as a preteen ("It changed my life forever"), he was driving with a nanny to his mom's country house. He then took guitar lessons—from a sideman in Hall and Oates. And when, after three years

confesses that the least sheltered place he's ever been is "on tour with Cibo Matto. I grew up sheltered. I was famous and protected, and I had bodyguards. I've always sought out situations where I could just be like everyone else. Going out on tour was the closest I ever came. It was just us, driving from place to place, and me only having as much money as my per diem. Staying at Motel 6's, moving the equipment. Just kind of doing it for the sake of wanting to do it."

This is refreshing to hear—as he points out, Julian could have used an apprenticeship before the industry exploited and discarded him. But it also sounds like the latest, hippest form of slumming. He speaks as if he could achieve commercial success without getting his hands dirty. "It's a game we're playing, so I might as well succeed at it." Yet the albums we cherish rarely sound as if they were recorded at play, with nothing of consequence at stake.

*And Into the Sun* is decidedly the work of a confirmed dabbler. It retreats from Cobain and Hendrix guitar, favoring Brazilian slink, Beatlesque harmonies, Beckian pastiche, a silky Radiohead homage, and



bullet. These were the kind of thoughts I would have when I was six or seven."

If you remember the December, 1990 day we heard the news about his father, then you know Sean Lennon's age, more or less—the "Beautiful Boy" of five left behind. We lost track after that. There was Julian Lennon, the half brother sired but not raised by John, who flickered through the charts with "Too Late for Goodbyes," an imitation creepier than any Silverchair. But Sean, the true heir, grew up in peace until 1995, when he emerged playing guitar on Yoko Ono's *Rising*, an album more accomplished and extreme than she'd ever managed with her Beastie. Next thing, he was playing bass for Cibo Matto, a duo of Japanese immigrants steeped in New York hipsterdom, and then dating the group's principal musician, Yuka Honda.

Celebrity spawn are abundant, just another form of media seaweed: here a Wilson Phillips, there a Jakob Dylan. But the prospect that John Lennon and

at a Swiss boarding school, he came back to New York and heard Nirvana's *Bleach*. Lennon recorded his first grunge songs on a 12-track mixing deck given to him by Michael Jackson.

But his coolness has mostly instigated himself, by pushing his mom to attempt *Rising*. "I have to take credit for it. If it wasn't for me, she wouldn't have made that record. She was making this *New York Rock* record—you know what that is? [Yes, the cheesy score to a 1995 off-Broadway musical.] That's where she was at. And I said, 'Mom, let's make Plastic Ono Band music.'" Tantalized by a grunge Yoko, the underground came calling. "*Rising* was the passage into that world," says the kid with the John Lennon sideburns, still thrilled beyond proportion. "*Rising* is what brought the attention from Sonic Youth, what brought Capitol to get us a remix from Cibo Matto, what got Cibo Matto to come over to our house, became friends with me. We jammed. I played with Cibo Matto. The Beasties were there. I met the Beasties. Then I was in."

The Beasties' Adam Yauch, who signed him to Grand Royal, enthuses about Lennon's unselfconscious refusal of convention. He recalls Lennon giving money to a strung-out homeless person. Yauch said not to waste it. "And Sean said just, 'That's his prerogative. If that person just wants to get wasted, let him get wasted.'"

As for his own experience on the margins, Lennon

**For someone who understandably counts "overcoming a fear of strangers" as one of life's great obstacles, Lennon is relentlessly optimistic.**  
**"I'm much more easygoing than my dad was," he says**

Oh, Sean: All he is saying, is give juggling a chance.

touches of jazz and country. The shock, though, is it coheres; particularly striking is its effortless balance of '80s and '90s sounds. But there isn't much fire in its belly, and not only because, to quote the auteur, "When I was making this record I was into beauty and sweetness."

Lennon habitually converses in such sweeping terms, like someone whose every utterance has been taken seriously. He makes you squirm talking about how Buddhism saved him from Cartesian dualism, how today's generation likes all forms of music; he even feels compelled to explain hip-hop's use of James Brown samples. It's the same sense of entitlement that leaves him unembarrassed in concert to apply his wheezy slip of a voice to "God Only Knows," a song he's not even remotely fit to reinterpret.

But he's come out of his personal labyrinth as whole as anyone could possibly expect; when nudged about Yuka Honda—and the oddness of his having wound up with an older woman, Japanese-born but Western-emigrated, with her own artistic career—he immediately chimes in, "and whose name is two letters different from my mom?" He laughs. "Whatever. I'm not going to analyze it too much."

"I'm much more easygoing than my dad was," says Lennon. "I'm more like my mom in that sense, but I'm even more easygoing than her. I just try to be as friendly, and open, and easygoing as possible, because it's a way of claiming my own personality or something." Who could begrudge him? •





"You SICKS COULD LAB" CIRAN PARR - 028"

**I**t was one of those heady moments when the underground felt indomitable and the rest of us felt cooler than a Beastie Boy at yoga class. The site: a tattered-up Miami Beach rock hall. The players: Roni Size's Reprazent crew. The hosts: dance-culture bible *Urb*, dance-culture party planners the Winter Music Conference, and dance-culture gate-crashers Mercury Records. The sold-out house audibly hummed with expectation as a posse of fluid, unboggly attired bald men patrolled the stage like Public Enemy's stoic British cousins. And when the DJ finally touched needles to duplicate, smoke machines shrouded the room and dilated teens eagerly bobbed their heads. For an instant, insider worries that a community was being lost, and industry worries that electronica won't go pop, evaporated in a flurry of pulsing snare drums.

Well, almost.

Welcome to "Electronica Does America," the often pretentious, often comic bit of theater that opened its 1998 run March 7-11 at Miami Beach's 13th annual Winter Music Conference. As if to answer this past year's rock-centric resistance, the crowds throng-

Once a shambling conclave of predominantly gay house music insiders who snoozed through panels on the semantics of Hi-NRG, the Conference is now both a music-nerd mecca and a crucial major-label schmooze. From an artistic and business perspective, it perfectly reflected electronica's current conditions. MTV's Amp rented a house where Dimitri From Paris, Jungle Brothers, and others spun records or gave interviews. Shrewd labels such as Columbia feted an impressive group of artists (Grooverider, Josh Wink, Hardkiss), while less-educated newcomers scrambled to showcase middle-level acts. Maverick, kicking off a distribution deal with the British label XL (where Prodigy got their start), hosted Basement Jaxx in a chi-chi bar. Meanwhile, the Warner Bros. party featured Natural Born Chillers rockin' the moldy cabana behind my rather shabby hotel. As one perky exec exclaimed poolside, "I can't wait to see Roni Size. I hear she [sic] is incredible!" And the exec's label signed Roni Size. Doh!

Size, the Bristol, England, jungle DJ/producer whose *New Forms* won the 1997 Mercury Prize for the U.K.'s album of the year, is currently the most celebrated electronica hopeful. Precisely tweaking the tradition of black science-fiction funk, Reprazent grooves like hip-hop evolving in crisp,

says *DJ Times* editor Jim Tremayne, who attended his first Conference in 1991. "Like, what's wrong with us? Why is it blowing up in Europe? But since straight, white kids started buying turntables, the culture has begun changing. It's slowly but surely becoming the next Nirvana-type thing, whether the old-line gay house people or the old-line rock people understand it or not."

**K**nown as the best "working" vacation in the music business, described endearingly with mobile DJs from Alabama in scary shorts" or "the place your college Ecstasy dealer is most likely to go pro," the Winter Music Conference grew up fast this year in spite of itself (panels like "Music and Technology: Wanna Cyber?" are still nothing more than an excuse to ignore 2 A.M. wake-up calls). Headquartered at the Fontainebleau Hilton Resort & Towers, a palatial salute to '50s-'90s peacock decadence, the Conference was founded in 1986 by local thirtysomething DJ dudes Louis Possetti and Bill Kelly. A modestly debauched annual event, it thrived on the verities of SPF 15 during the day, and drag queen dives at night.

Until the past three years, that is,

works, ftrr, smje, City of Angels, and Moonshine now control major events.

"When I first attended the Conference in the early '90s, it was all about schmoozing the New York house mafia," says DB, who as ABR for smje/Profile has passionately preached the jungle gospel in the States; he now runs an electronic dance label (F-111) through Warner Bros. with Andrew Goldstone, former codirector of Astralwerks. "But like the industry itself, it's undergoing a major shift. People's eyes and ears are opening up, due to the Chemicals and Prodigy, and Roni Size is opening up minds all over the place as well. I mean, MTV's 12 Angry Viewers gave the 'Brown Paper Bag' video a perfect score. Those kids had never heard that shit before, and they were like, 'Yo, this is dope.'"

Even Conference vets like Bobby Shew, vice president of dance/crossover at MCA and Madonna's first record promoter, feels a change is overdue. "How long you gonna bang your head against the wall with house music? Let's move on. It just ain't happening. I'm getting exposed to all these general I'm not familiar with—and I should be."

A pivotal year in the Conference's artistic shift this year was Josh Wink, the blond-dreadlocked DJ/producer and cofounder (with King Britt) of the Ruff-House/Columbia-distributed Ovum label. He organized and headlined a gig at the

# THE WINTER OF OUR DISCOTHEQUES

Once a tiny conclave of dance music insiders, Miami's hedonistic Winter Music Conference is now the industry's favorite poolside schmooze. Charles Aaron takes da dip

ILLUSTRATION BY CIARAN PARR

ing the Conference's five days of primarily DJ gigs emphatically confirmed that electronic dance music is a serious, commercial force with still-vital roots, not just a firestarter fad. The event also confirmed its status as the tipster place to see and be seen, surpassing Austin's South by Southwest (SXSW) and the New York City-based CMJ Music Marathon. At SXSW, there are mostly up-and-coming bands playing for four to five hours at a time," says Adam Shore, A&R at Wax Trax!TV. "In Miami, you have legend after legend after legend—Juan Atkins, 'Little' Louie Vega, Carl Craig, Carl Cox—and the nights just keep on going. I got home one morning at 10 A.M., for chrissakes!"

sleek fast-forward. Based on his Winter Music Conference throwdown— swooshing sirens and harsh spotlights accompanying a sexpot diva (Onalee), an MC (Dynamite) with real skills, a fully integrated live drummer and double-bassist, plus a programming foursome dressed like guerrilla hackers in black hoodies—Size may be the first artist with the idealistic savvy to craft a DJ-based music that smokes rock'n'roll's ass without stooping to schmooch it first.

"American dance music in the '90s always had this stepchild mentality."

when attendance almost tripled, from 1,200 registrants in 1995 to nearly 3,000 this year—and that's not including thousands more non-paying bum-rushers. (The networking-in-Speedo pool scene at the Fontainebleau was monitored closely by a squad of Miami police.) In that same period, the number of participating artists also tripled, to approximately 400. The Conference's boom is directly related to the techno/jungle generation—European and American kids who have grown up in the rave scene and are now getting down to business. As a result, relatively young electronica labels such as Astral-

intimately cushy Living Room, which featured original American rave maestro Doc Martin in the main room spinning a wall-rattling set of soulful techno that filtered Michael Jackson's "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" into Larry Heard's classic '80s jack track "Can You Feel It," and that MILK-in-sequins sermon: "You may be black / You may be white / You may be Jew / You may be Gentile / It don't make no difference in our house." In the back room, Britt and 4 Hero's Dego MacFarlane made that homily reefty, deftly blending hip-hop, R&B, and drum'n'bass for a mixed crowd. Ovum's mission—to infuse the hooky side of '80s Chicago house and Detroit techno with whomping acid



The networking-in-Speedos pool scene at the Fontainebleau was monitored closely by a squad of Miami police



breakbeats, plus the occasional Trent Reznor cameo—is hinted at on Wink's new album *HEREHEAR*.

A longtime supporter of the Winter Music Conference, Columbia/Sony also sponsored a couple of thunderously bass-bombing gigs for jungle godfather Grooverider at Club Onyx and Salvation; at the latter, he followed the Chemical Brothers' crazy booze-hound uncle Fatboy Slim, whose British Big Beat label, Skint, recently inked a distribution deal with Sony. Bay Area techno sensualists Hardkiss tossed a party at the divey lounge Luu, where Scott, Robbie, and Gavin got sloshed, took Polaroids with their dates, and played the kitchen sink for a handful of fans. They have a Columbia-distributed album slated for next year.

"We've done the rave thing, we've done our goofy homemade releases, but I always thought the point was to eventually get as many people to hear your music as possible," said congenitally genial Scott Hardkiss. "At least that used to be the point."

But to soak up Miami's indigenous dance culture, cruise Washington Ave., the main club drag, late any Saturday night and submit yourself to South Beach's bass *en scene*. It's a riot of reverberation in which

every vehicle, from puny Acuras to white stretch limos to modified Desert Storm hummers (no joke), overfilled their immense stereo systems with the deafening 908 distortion of Miami Bass. When 96.7 Beach Radio served up a fur-flying, whistle-squealing 200 BPM version of Quad City DJs' "C'Mon 'N Ride It (The Train)," our car lurched and almost blindsided an "international male" stationed outside the Madonna-frequented nightspot Liquid. "Let's see DJ Spooky remix that," piped a voice from the backseat.

This, in a nutshell, was the theme of the 1998 Winter Music Conference. Drop the bass! Maybe we all need to feel a primal tug one last time before the century slips. Or maybe shaking-that-ass is today's equivalent of banging your head. Whatever the case, Propellerheads, who played a "live" gig at the Cristal club (neon champagne glass, midget-in-e-tux doorman), were sadly miscast. Two Brit session dudes signed for a zillion quid to DreamWorks, Alex Gifford and Will White are DJ Fred Travaleñas — they can impersonate everybody (Chemicals, Colcudt, John Barry, Stevie Winwood), but so what? Sure, "History Repeating," their duet with "Goldfinger" diva Shirley Bassey, is lovely, and the Prodigy rip ("Bang On") is a keeper, but White is an even more pointless live drummer than that fool in Bentley Rhythm Ace. The duo's cocktronica clatter gets tired way too fast.

Thankfully, this sort of crass funklessness was an exception, and redemptive moments (i.e., bass and drugs and planets properly aligned) were the rule. At Liquid, "Little" Louie Vega spun a lavish set of galloping house, Latin percussion, and screaming divas, with a side trip into DJ Pierre's "Horn Song," which features an extended Miles Davis-ish trumpet solo and bizarre Moog workout. At Groove Jet, Carl Cox unleashed an ebullient techno stampede—303 depth charges, cymbal crashes, Miami Bass bits, James Brown whoops—which somehow turned the cheeseball rave anthem "Meet Her at the Love Parade" (also worked later that night by Brit club icon Paul Oakden) into a metallic icon-melt. And at the same club two nights later, Fatboy Slim's *Shindig* like dance party found common ground in everything from garage punk to acid house to hyperspeed Public Enemy warped Daft Punk. Throwing his scrawny arms over his head, Fatboy, a.k.a. Norman Cook, the balding belling ex-new waver, dropped the bass and let it ride like a train. ♦



By land or by sea: the British DJ boat-lift. From top, the U.K.'s Deadbeat (left, with Roni Size, right) and Fatboy Slim wash up on Miami's shores; Carl Cox, left, and Roni Size schmooze poolside; Propellerheads (Alex Whits, left, and Will White) bungle the jungle.



For a man-on-the-streets view of the electronica fun at the Winter Music Conference, look on SPINonline at keyword: Spin on America Online.



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A bashful senior.



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# SEX ED.

For the students at Vassar College,  
hooking up is as easy as ordering a pizza.

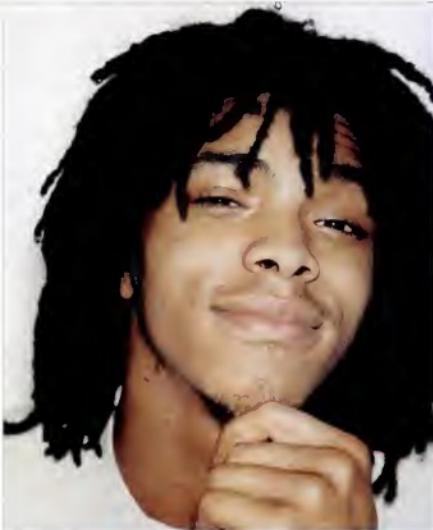
The indigestion, though, is a problem  
by Eric Konigsberg

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIETER MAYR

**N**ineteen ninety-seven was the year Cody Kushner turned down sex, and this, it must be understood, was no small matter, for since he arrived at Vassar two and a half years ago, sex has been everywhere Kushner is. "The prospect of sex, anyway," he said recently, meaning that it has been there at parties, of course; and any time people were drunk; or walking home along the Gothic fieldstone wall by the front quadrangle as dusk began to roll out its gauzy canopy; or even in the stacks at Thompson library. A couple of weeks back, a girl he'd always had a thing for propositioned him in the

"It's almost like you stake your claim each night. You can go down to the Mug and get whatever you want. I got a little bit out of hand last year, and I would say, 'Tonight I want a long-haired girl, then a short-haired girl, then a tall girl,' and so on"

—R. Damion Williams



R. Damion Williams

dining hall—in the flat of daylight, where everyone at the salad bar could hear.

"Honestly, I consider myself a gentleman, at least I am when I'm in a rational state of mind, but I consistently find myself in this position where it's just me and a girl, alone," Kushner said, allowing his voice to trail off. Then he tried again. "Sometimes, before I know it, I'm just in this girl's bed, and...you know."

At the moment, Kushner was pulling the taps at Matthew's Mug, the on-campus bar where he is the manager Saturday nights. To see him holding court there behind the bar, a junior in hiking boots and a ski sweater, skipping over all the songs by white people on the *Boogie Nights* soundtrack, you get only half the picture. Yes, Kushner is handsome—with a smooth, guileless face, good teeth, and sandy hair. He has big ears and rounded features and heavy eyebrows that, all together, give him some resemblance to a bear cub. But there is more to it than his looks. Kushner is sincere, and he knows that to certain girls there is nothing more appealing than sincere. Sincere means Kushner is better than average at talking about his feelings. It is not impossible that within the first five minutes of meeting someone, he will divulge that he wept when he dumped his girlfriend last year.

A blond approached, eyes as blue as a Mannerist angel's, stacked heels like on a Cuban hooker.

"Cody," she said, reaching over the bar to give him a big hug.

Kushner tugged at the visor of his baseball cap. "Hey," he said.

"Cody, you are so sincere."

Jessica, a student barmaid, overheard this and said, "Cody's too sincere. It gets kind of corny, but it works. I mean, it's attractive. He has more women after him than anyone should."

The thought occurs when talking to Kushner that maybe his sincerity is at least in part an act. Certainly, he himself seems more aware than anyone that at a place like Vassar, where straight women outnumber straight men nearly two to one, nice guys can finish first. He did once admit that taking a girl on the hand, which is what he does when he first finds himself alone with one whom he likes, is "a good move." The problem is that somewhere along the way Kushner bought into the legend of his own sincerity, came to actually believe in his sincerity. He started being a nice guy without even considering if he was getting something in return. Which had a drawback of its own: Not only did treating girls well—he is the only starting midfielder on the lacrosse team who actually believes in dating—

make it easier to bed them, it made it more difficult to break their hearts.

And that was when the unthinkable happened, and Cody Kushner turned down sex.

It was a party during fall semester. Around 1 A.M., Kushner found himself talking to a girl he didn't know all that well. "Amazing body," he remembered, "works out a lot, good-size rack, brown hair, brown eyes—which is inconsistent for me, because, you know, normally I like blonds, and blue eyes, especially." By 2 A.M., they were back at his apartment, watching *SportsCenter*, and she began pouring vodka.

"Don't I get a thank you for the shot?" she wanted to know after a while. Kushner kissed her on the cheek.

"That's not enough," she said.

So the next thing Kushner knew, they were making out in his bedroom, and he slid his hand beneath the hem of her blouse, and up along her stomach and beyond, which was fun. And then, kind of by rote, he had his hand down her jeans, and that was okay too, working it for a few minutes, and her breathing was starting to catch, a heavily exaggerated sine curve. But all of a sudden, on the way to his bed, Kushner felt the bracing slap of perspective, and he could see himself: His desk lamp was on and the mirror on his closet door was like this pell-mell lens—his mind's eye—and he saw the two of them, tussling clumsily below a poster of Clint Eastwood, as if he were observing someone else. He envisioned what he would do waking up with the girl the next day. If it was this easy he'd feel cheap and sleazy and it would take him a couple of days to resume his life. "It wouldn't be like I could just walk outside and have lunch and forget about it," he said. "I'm the kind of person, I have to see the relevance of something before I do it." And every time he's done something irrelevant like this, it's disturbed him from his schoolwork. He's majoring in Poli Sci.

Kushner was wishing he could just roll over and drift off the edge of the futon, into the night, without any explanation or spoon-making or guilt. He was wondering, *Is this what it feels like to be a girl?*

Kushner pulled away from her. "I have to get up early tomorrow and go to New York," he said.

The girl sat up, but nobody said anything. Finally she asked if it was time for her to leave.

"It was interesting,"  
Cody said  
of a night spent in bed  
with two female students.  
"I told a couple of friends,  
because they asked.  
And it got back to  
the girls and a lot of people  
knew about it.  
They were annoyed.  
They probably just  
look at me as a dumb guy"

- Cody Kushner



Renee



Cody Kushner

**I**s this sex? Let us not turn our heads or otherwise decline to identify it as the deed itself, and perhaps in its rawest state, with none of the old push and pull, the plea and denial, the "Yes!" and the "No way!" that have plagued the act since...well, since a very long time ago. Perhaps there are college campuses somewhere in America where the vestiges of sexual repression and denial still maintain, but not here, that's for sure.

Here, the fraternity boy of the soul is dead. The coed is, too. Now—who's left?

I met Kushner on a Saturday night at the beginning of the school year, having arrived on Vassar's campus about an hour before and wandered pretty much by accident into a dorm party. Soon, he had become one of a handful of students whose carnal and romantic adventures I would attempt to follow throughout the term. The Townhouses, where Kushner shares an apartment with four friends, is a crescent of five low-slung redwood A-frames set among the pine groves of Poughkeepsie, New York, just off State Highway 376. Particularly because most of the students living there are 21, the Townhouses have become a social hub on campus. On any given night, you can stand on the grass at the center of the complex and spot a handful of keg parties. The apartments, rustic and airy, bear some resemblance to chalets at a down-market ski resort, and this adds to the atmosphere of insouciant but temporary depravity, where caution's taken a holiday but graduation looms.

Living across the parking lot from Kushner, in another row of Townhouses, Diane Kaplan was not embarrassed to find herself fed up at this point in her Vassar career. She's ready to graduate to something better, in June, and she throws most of her time into working on a writing project and her thesis. At first glance she was all streaked hair and blade-like nose and battle-ready for a job as a D-girl, but her bowlegged stance and the way she could never stop fidgeting with the rings on her fingers revealed she was still vulnerable and childlike, too.

"The most absurd thing here are the gossip servers on the computer network," she said. Indeed, Kaplan logged on one afternoon to show how kids had set up bulletin boards under such headings as "Freshmen I Want to Fuck"; "Ten Most Wanted Men at Vassar" (this list had only one person on it at the moment); "Top Ten Whores"; "Top Ten Ugly Dudes Who Pull the Most Bitches" (someone

## It's difficult to name another school that makes as many ostentatious pledges to sexual openness as Vassar

had entered Cody Kushner sixth on that list, with the envious comment, "I just don't get it"; "Top Ten Good-Looking Girls That Get No Play"; and "Top Ten Awful Things That Have Ever Happened to You" (No. 10: "Got rejected from Brown, had to come here." To which another student had added, "Didn't we all?").

Kaplan bit at her thumbnail. "By senior year I've stopped reading them, but all the underclassmen read them. Sometimes a name that really seems incongruous will appear on a list, like some dork will put himself No. 3 on the list of hottest juniors, and then someone else will put an asterisk and say, 'So and so, you wrote this.'" Kaplan said her name (which has been changed for this article) had appeared on one of the sex servers a lot last year, but she wouldn't say in what context. "You can take yourself off a list but you'll be back on within a couple of hours because everyone reads them and knows who belongs where," she said.

The night before the midterm break, Kaplan and her roommates threw a keg party. "The thing about Vassar is that straight men thrive here," Kaplan said at one point, when she was good and drunk. "No matter who you are, no matter what you look like, women flock to you."

A girl passing on her way to the bathroom overheard this and said, "Women here will stoop to such low levels it's despicable."

Everyone on campus floated a different estimate for the number of sex partners the average Vassar student has over the course of four years, and each ballpark figure came with its own set of corollaries. But men end women alike concluded the women, simply because of the numbers, have it tougher when it comes to sex and romance. They outnumber men at Vassar, and a high percentage of the men are gay (though a high percentage of the women are, too). The result is that heterosexual women at Vassar have to be more aggressive than their counterparts at other colleges, and heterosexual men, having been afforded this luxury, are considerably less aggressive (than Vassar women or college men elsewhere).

"Fifteen to 20," said Tobias Anderson, a senior, "but that's hooking up. In terms of actually having sex, it's a lot less. Vassar students are promiscuous, but they tend to fool around without actually sleeping together. Of course, there are lots of exceptions." He told of a girl he was friendly with, a senior, who'd set out on a spree in September and by Christmas had already slept with 11 boys. Lots of others said 15 partners sounded about right.

Ramdon Williams, a handsome junior from Harlem, famous around campus as a ladies' man, said, "If you're a heterosexual dude, you're pretty much living the life. The way it works, it's almost like you stake your claim each night. On any given night, you can go down to the Mug and get whatever you want. I got a little bit out of hand last year, and I would say, 'Tonight I want a long-haired girl, then a short-haired girl, then a tall girl,' and so on. Then in the spring, the estrogen is really in the air, and you have all these senior girls running around hooking up with underclass guys."

Nearby stood two polished young women, one tall with an aristocratic face, black tuxedo pants, cashmere turtleneck, tortoiseshell handbag, and Gucci sandals (even in the cold, even in a spongy basement), the other wearing a shiny cocktail dress and drop earrings. They appeared to be flirting with a weak-chinned boy in fake Patagonia.

"I'm not a Jap," Cocktail Dress was saying. She touched the boy's shoulder lightly. "Except I do the tower dance when I get out of the shower. Is that Jappy?"

The boy went to fetch more beers, and the two girls giggled as he left.

"Just ask him," the tall girl said. "When he comes back, just say, 'Do you want to go upstairs and fool around?'"

**W**here sex and college students truly do combust these days is in the talking-about-it. A growing movement in academia today involves the study of sexuality—its causes and significance—as its own proper discipline. There was a highly publicized seminar at the State University of New York at New Paltz, for example, to which the school invited sadomasochists to discuss the finer points of bondage. (Vassar students subsequently protested when the governor of New York condemned the president of SUNY-New Paltz for permitting the talk.) At Brown, where you can major in Sexuality and Soci-



Lauren

ety, one course involves watching the owner of a sex shop in town demonstrate the latest erotic paraphernalia on a latex vagina. Students in a class called Sexuality Today at the University of Virginia pair off (boy-girl) to make Play-Doh sculptures of each other's genitals. Susan Tate, who teaches the class at UVA, told the *New York Times* in December that the point of the exercise is to demystify sex. "If we can discuss the heart, stomach, and elbow without embarrassment, we should be able to talk about the penis, clitoris, and vagina without laughing," she said. "I'm trying to tell the students what's good about sex."

**J**ust a few doors from Diane Kaplan's apartment is a place that seems a world away from Diane and her fellow sophisticated Humanities majors—with their severely cut hairdos. In a neighboring house lives a group of earlier, less polished girls—math and science types in boho-wool slippers. Even so, these girls occupy roles in a soap opera of their own. By the third week of the term, Karen had already fooled around with four boys, and a few weeks later it was up to six, and all of them but one she referred to as "repeat offenders." Her excuse for the bender—and her roommates were gathered in the living room one Thursday night, goading her into proffering one—was that she was trying to ease the awkwardness of reentry, having spent junior year abroad where she'd met a boy from another school, a boy she was continuing to see but from whom she needed to create "some emotional distance."

Before classes even started there was a thing with a guy she'd slept with through most of freshman year, though they'd never actually declared themselves boyfriend and girlfriend, and she was still finding herself very attracted to him mostly on account of his not caring much if she was. The first night of the term was her 21st birthday, and her oldest friend at Vassar tried to kiss her on her front steps, pretty much the same thing he'd done every year. Then came another guy, who is just about Karen's best friend but is very definitely the best friend of her boyfriend from sophomore year. Afterward, they all talked about it and the old boyfriend was really sad and upset, like seriously not talking to Karen and not going out, and sitting in his room and letting his Phish CD repeat over and over without getting up to change it. How it happened was she and the other boy were both drunk hanging out and he said his room on main

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campus was too far to go back and so Karen said he could sleep in her bed. "It was good," she said, "because there'd been so much sexual tension between us for three years."

"Everyone's got sexual tension between them," said one of Karen's friends. "If you want to look at it that way."

Numbers four, five, and six for Karen were: a guy who'd graduated two years before and showed up to visit his friends; Karen's high-school boyfriend; and finally, a boy who didn't count because even the next day she couldn't remember it, except for the part about waking up to turn off the alarm clock and discovering she wasn't in her own bed. Another roommate, Nicole, arrived from upstairs, in dainty wire-rimmed eyeglasses and an enorak. "You are not going out tonight," Karen said. "You have had way too much of a week this week."

"This has been such a strange week," Nicole conceded, sitting on the edge of a chair to tie her sneakers. "It just hasn't been a normal week for me. Three boys in one week!" Nicole seemed to be the sexual lightning rod of the house. Everyone encouraged her escapades and tried to divine direction from them. Especially in the past month, since out of the blue her boyfriend had dumped her and she had sought enthusiastic consolation in other admirers, most notably a freshman she knew from one of her classes.

"He apparently had a crush on me," Nicole said. "I could really tell when he shared this love letter with me. He signed it, 'From a guy who's a little bit insane.' Karen began to laugh and raised her voice. "But what he wrote..."

"What he wrote isn't important," said Nicole.

...he wrote, "Quite simply..."

"Come on..."

"...Quite simply, I want your legs around my thighs."

An embarrassed hush fell over the room. Nicole forced a smile. "And then they were," she said. "My legs, I mean."

Nicole wanted to go with Karen to a party at one of the other Townhouses, but worried about running into her old boyfriend. "When I see him, I feel ill," she

## "I think Vassar is the only place in the world where a girl can just throw herself at someone and be flat-out rejected"

said. "Last Friday, I told him we couldn't be friends because I wanted to keep things separated from him, and he said, 'Well, fucking someone else won't help, because it didn't for me.' It just left me speechless. I mean, it really upset me."

The most famous portrayal (yet) of Vassar in literature is Mary McCarthy's 1963 novel *The Group*, which traces the stories of eight young women from the same class at Vassar after graduation. For the most part, McCarthy (Vassar class of 1933) poked fun at these silly, pretentious, assertively sophisticated girls who constantly found themselves whipsawed by a lack of self-awareness. More than 20 years after its publication and the brouhaha that ensued, McCarthy told an interviewer she still had no difficulty recognizing the refined yet clumsy Vassar girl, a type for all ages. This, she said, was because of "their desire to be superior—superior to others, superior to their community. There is a certain daringness, sometimes simply a wish to be daring."

This hasn't changed much since McCarthy's day. In the throes of coeducation fever that hit the '60s, Vassar considered merging with Yale, located more than an hour away, then balked, and while the rest of the Seven Sisters either acquiesced to offers of being subsumed by Ivy League neighbors (Radcliffe with Harvard, Barnard with Columbia) or defiantly remained single sex (Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke), Vassar, in 1968, simply opened its doors to men. The very progressive ethos that supported the inclusion of men at Vassar attracted a certain type of student, and the school immediately became known as an artsy, druggy, sexually omnivorous place.

It's difficult to name another school that makes as many ostentatious pledges to sexual openness. All but one of the dorms have coed bathrooms. On Founder's Day, the big spring holiday, students picnic on Sunset Lake, take psychedelics,

and fool around. In late September, one of the student activities groups sponsored a nude party at the Mug. They'd promoted the event as a protest against sweatshop conditions, but it was really intended as an excuse for everyone to go naked (most of the students went in their underwear). The fall term's biggest dance, for gays and straights alike, was the Homo Hop, put on by gay students. At Vassar, being gay is as much of an aesthetic decision as it is a sexual orientation. This is both a factor and a result of the sexually gravity-free atmosphere, and probably why you see a good bit more experimentation with homosexuality here—on the part of pretty straightlaced students, no less.

Cody Kushner was at the Mug one night with a gal pal, thoroughly shit-faced and elated about his sexual vitae. "I'm worried I'm going to a school like Vassar and I'm going to go four years without doing some silly, crazy thing," he said.

"That can be arranged," said his friend, half-jokingly. "Do you have a big futon?"

"So we went to a party and I was getting more drunk and kind of excited," Kushner recalled. "And she grabbed a friend of hers, another girl, and both these girls are hot, and straight, and we left together."

They arrived at Cody Kushner's apartment to find the whole women's soccer team hanging out there with his roommates. That's when one of the girls asked him to grab a Grateful Dead bootleg off his dresser, and the three of them, Kushner and the two girls, ran upstairs and locked themselves in his bedroom. "And I pleasureballed all of them alternately," he said.

"But I'm glad they didn't let me take it any farther. It was interesting. I told a couple of friends, because they asked. And it got back to the girls and a lot of people knew about it. They were annoyed. They probably just look at me as a dumb guy."

He attempted such adventurousness in the midst of trying to mend a slightly broken heart. Late during the previous year, he'd begun dating a senior on the brink of graduation. "I played the game of my life with that girl," Kushner said, having wooed her from another boy with anonymous e-mails and Jerky Boys impressions. But Kushner decided he wouldn't sleep with her "until she promised we'd be monogamous indefinitely." And though their relationship continued, on and off, through the summer and into the fall, he never did get what he wanted. Now that we're through and I never did have sex with her, I really regret it, physically. But she'd never tell me about her sexual past."

Kushner rode down to Brooklyn to visit her over midterm break, but she told him he was living in a fantasy world. The worst of it was, he'd just blown off a girl on campus, telling her he had a serious, full-time relationship in New York. Kushner was in tears when he got back to school.

He said what followed the next weekend made it the lowest point in his life. "I hooked up with two girls; I didn't want either one," he said. Of the second girl, he declared, "I would have rather been swimming in the freezing Hudson River than there in her bed. I wanted it to be stricken from the record."

Around her, Diene Kaplan saw her roommates happily carrying on with fairly evolved forms of the male species. One of her roommates had a 27-year-old man waiting for her to move out West with him when she graduated. "She is going to dump her Vassar boyfriend on Monday," Kaplan said upon introducing her one weekend. "That's when he hangs in his thesis."

The best thing Kaplan had going during her time in college was with a jock. It lasted through sophomore and junior years, but it was an on-again, off-again sort of arrangement. He spent more time with his buddies than with her, but she thought he was funny in a smart-ass way, and for the time being, that was enough. "He had a lot of problems, the Problem Child," Kaplan said. "He was a very defensive person; when he finally opened up and exposed all his issues—his parents, it sounds like, were very hard on him and he drinks a lot—it felt good that he trusted me, but I also felt it was too much to deal with. And when Problem Child sensed that, the walls went back up, and things got worse."

All of which was brought to bear whenever sex came into the picture. "We tried, dozens of times, but there were always, you know...problems." Kaplan told him she didn't care, but deep down she was pretty frustrated.

For the purpose of this article, two Vassar students—a boy and a girl—agreed to keep journals, anonymously, noting every sexual act that transpired in their lives during the semester. It wasn't until very late in the semester that the diarists finally showed me their works-in-progress, and at that point a few themes and patterns emerged. This is what happens when all the barriers to sex come down, I thought when I read them. Having reached the

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point of nearly complete license, they had created an environment that seemed melancholy, nihilistic, groping, purposeless, apathetic, lifeless. The tales they recounted were on one level frighteningly sophisticated and jaded, but on another, kind of animalistic and joyless and dumb.

When they did end up in bed, it seemed to have been just that—ending up there by chance, or due to someone else's insistence. "There's a knock at my door," the female dancist wrote. "Matt comes in. We screw around. In the morning he leaves and I know that when I see him next time on campus it will seem to everyone else that we're casual friends." One of the male dancist's entries reads: "This girl accosted me and told me that we were going home to my house immediately."

Though both were in and out of relationships, neither appeared willing to fall desperately in love, and neither appeared capable of being badly hurt. "Justin and I both nights had fun at the party together, but both nights I left with my friends. I know we'll hook up at some point. No need to do it now." "No one fought to save a romance, and no one worked hard to start one. The male's journal said of a relationship in good standing, "It seems to be a lot easier on me [on my psyche, my conscience, my relative health] to have a girlfriend." The girl wrote of one guy, "He admitted that he could be difficult and waxed poetic about how I meant so much to him and how we should give things another chance, blah blah blah. We kissed that night, but I removed myself to go home. I'm not really that eager to try again."

In the end, the boy recorded sexual encounters with ten people over the 14-week semester; the girl, only three.

**N**ot much happened all fall for Diane Kaplan, save for a couple of weekends entertaining a graduate working an entry-level job in venture capital, and the steady advances of a pseud who told her what books to read and pouted an entire evening after she caught her ring on his sweater and pulled out a thread. "I just em no longer interested in all these meaningless scams," she said. "Senior year is too late for that."

As Thanksgiving approached, Kaplan saw Problem Child at a party in one of the Townhouses. He looked like he'd been lifting weights all term, and he said a couple of his hometown friends were visiting, staying in his room.

"Can I stay in your room?" he asked. Kaplan told him sure.

She ran off to another party, came home, and fell asleep. Around 3 A.M., Kaplan, half awake, could feel he was in her room and had slipped under the covers. "And then all of a sudden, we're trying it again," Kaplan recalled. "And for the first time, this time, actually, everything worked! I was surprised. It was wonderful."

**C**ody Kushner got a new girlfriend late in the term, a freshman. "Very sweet," he said. "She's very pure—like she hadn't been with lots of guys who've poisoned her and given her baggage." He knew her a month before they kissed, and it was another three weeks until she stayed over.

One of the first nights she was in his bed, Kushner looked at her, the comforter up to her armpits, and thought of how great and normal she was. He realized she made him want to volunteer personal information, just to let her know he trusted her, and to let her know how much he'd calmed down since he was a freshman. It was as if the more she knew about him, the more he felt there was a bond.

Kushner told her how many girls he'd slept with in his life, "and the circumstances with each of them."

When he'd finished, she pressed herself against Kushner's chest, squeezed his hand, and cast her eyes upward.

"Do you have any questions for me?" she asked.

"No," he said.

**W**ithin a few months, Diana Kaplan and her classmates would be out in the world, to be replaced by a newer batch of visitors from the future of sexual relations—kids like those you'd see in an underclass dorm at Vassar.

The last Saturday night of the term found Sarah, Meghan, Sharon, and Lauren, all freshmen, at a reading table in the Main Building's third-story common room, while beside them a bunch of bohemian sophomore boys were shooting pool. Reading period had come at last and this meant a few days of anemic industry before exams, and then Christmas vacation, but for them it was a time to reflect upon the rowdy misadventures the past three months had brought, drawing up lists of their sexual conquests and diagrams that connected each of them to one another, either directly or through shared knowledge of outside people. The girls had met in September, assigned to rooms upstairs in Main, and quickly became campus celebrities, after staging an "orgy"

and a "pseudo-orgy," with the sophomore boys in the dorm.

"The funny thing, most of us fit one stereotype," Sarah said, tilting her head back slightly to one side and twirling a strand of hair. "Catholic girls." She'd been an instigator all along, and each of the others, especially the boys, seemed to have a crush on her hyacinthine, doll-like prettiness.

Oddly, it was one of the boys who had set things off. The first week, the whole group, relative strangers then, sat in his room watching Kevin Smith movies. Later, one of the guys "was begging me to take my clothes off and you know how malleable I am when I'm drunk," Sarah said. "I started to, and he said, 'I've never seen anyone take their clothes off elegantly.' Everyone con-

"A lot of the girls here are into that *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* kind of feminism," said Greg. "Am I right?"

sidered that a challenge. By the end of the night, we'd all gotten naked."

"It was hilarious," Meghan said.

"Meghan and I, we were both very sexually active in high school," Sarah said. She grew up in the Midwest and had a semi-clandestine fling with a bartender ten years older at a fern bar where she worked as a hostess. "It makes sense that we'd have started in on this here."

"But the rest of them," Meghan said, laughing. "Oh my God, Sarah, remember how hard we had to work to get them all to loosen up?"

"I'm still like, 'What were you guys doing up till now?'" said Sarah.

Sarah's list of conquests was by far the longest, 22 people just since matriculation, ten she described as "significant sexual experiences, which means someone's clothes were off." It was mostly all boys, though she'd kissed her girlfriends, this being Vassar and all. "I had to try something new when I got to college. Even Sharon and I have kissed."

"That was weird," said Sharon. "Weird, weird, weird."

A boy named Stiles, who until now had been silent at the pool table with Jonny and Greg, broke in. "Sarah, tell the truth why you and Sharon really kissed."

Everybody burst into hysterics, until finally Meghan said, "Sarah and Sharon had to kiss so Greg would show us his testicles."

"They're enormous," Meghan said.

"My dick is normal size," Greg said, drawing his cue stick back and not looking up from his shot.

"God knows it's hard enough to get anything from the guys here," Lauren said.

"A lot of our guy friends are virgins," Sharon said. "Still."

"A lot of girls here are into that *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* kind of feminism," said Greg. "Am I right?"

Sarah stayed up all night memorizing flashcards for an art history exam. The next morning, Meghan showed up in her room for a smoke. They sat Indian style on a pearl-gray carpet sample, two long-limbed girls at 18.

"Look at us," Meghan said. "Women of the Seven Sisters." She had on sweatpants and her roots were showing. The winter light slanted in harshly and they both looked pale and withdrawn.

"This is it," Sarah said. "I swear, I would think Vassar is the only place in the world where as a girl you can just throw yourself at someone and be flat-out rejected. I can't believe how many guys here wanted to hook up but not have sex. It was too much of an attachment for them. All the boys I've fooled around with want relationships."

Meghan mentioned a friend. "He was a virgin," she said.

"Totally," Sarah said.

Meghan straightened in her chair. "I said, 'He was a virgin.'

Sarah squealed. "Oh my God! Last night?"

"Uh huh. We're not supposed to discuss it because he was weird about it."

Sarah was silent for a moment. She took a grown-up-looking drag on her cigarette. "What a week, you and me," she said. "It took me until the other day to finally have sex with a guy at Vassar. And then afterward, we went out to dinner. That was amazing. My first date in my life." ●



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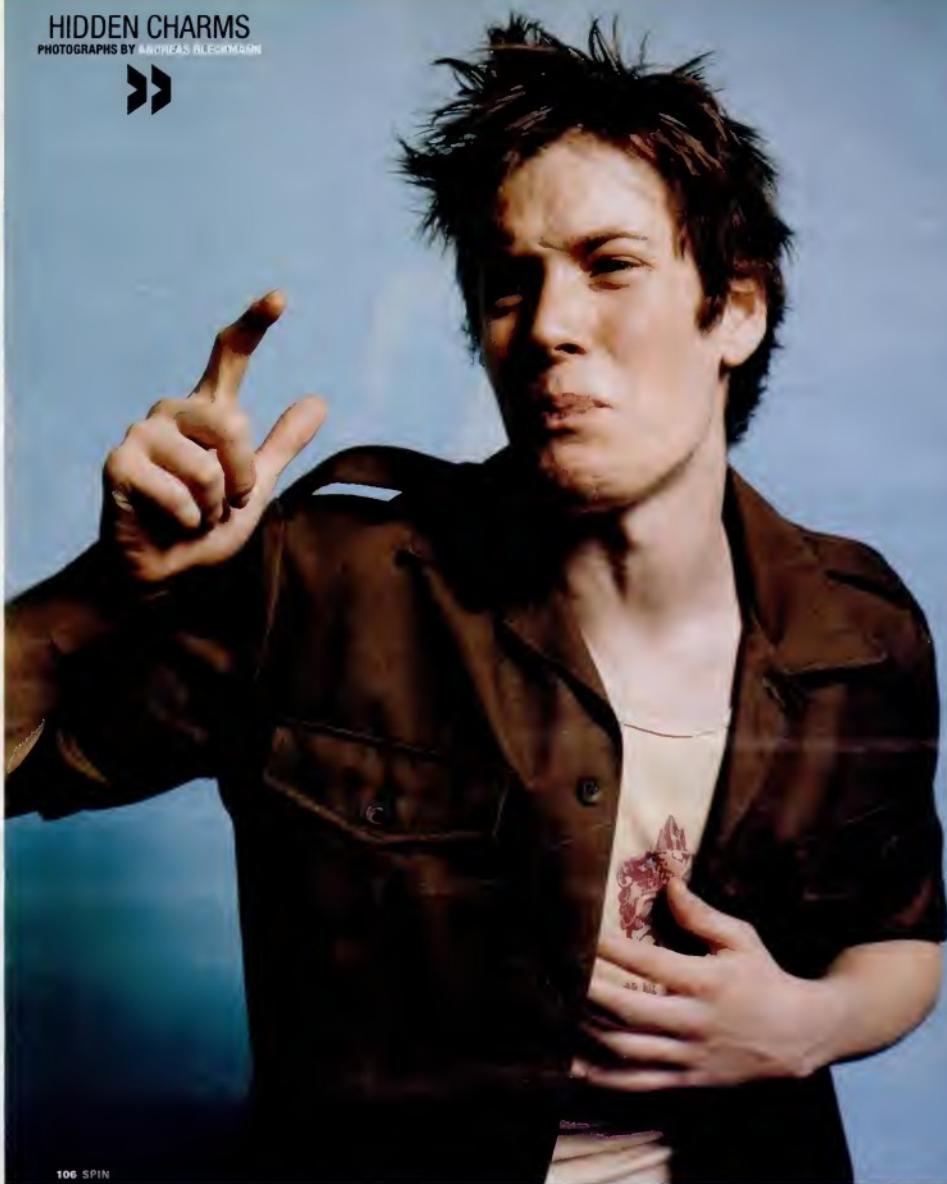


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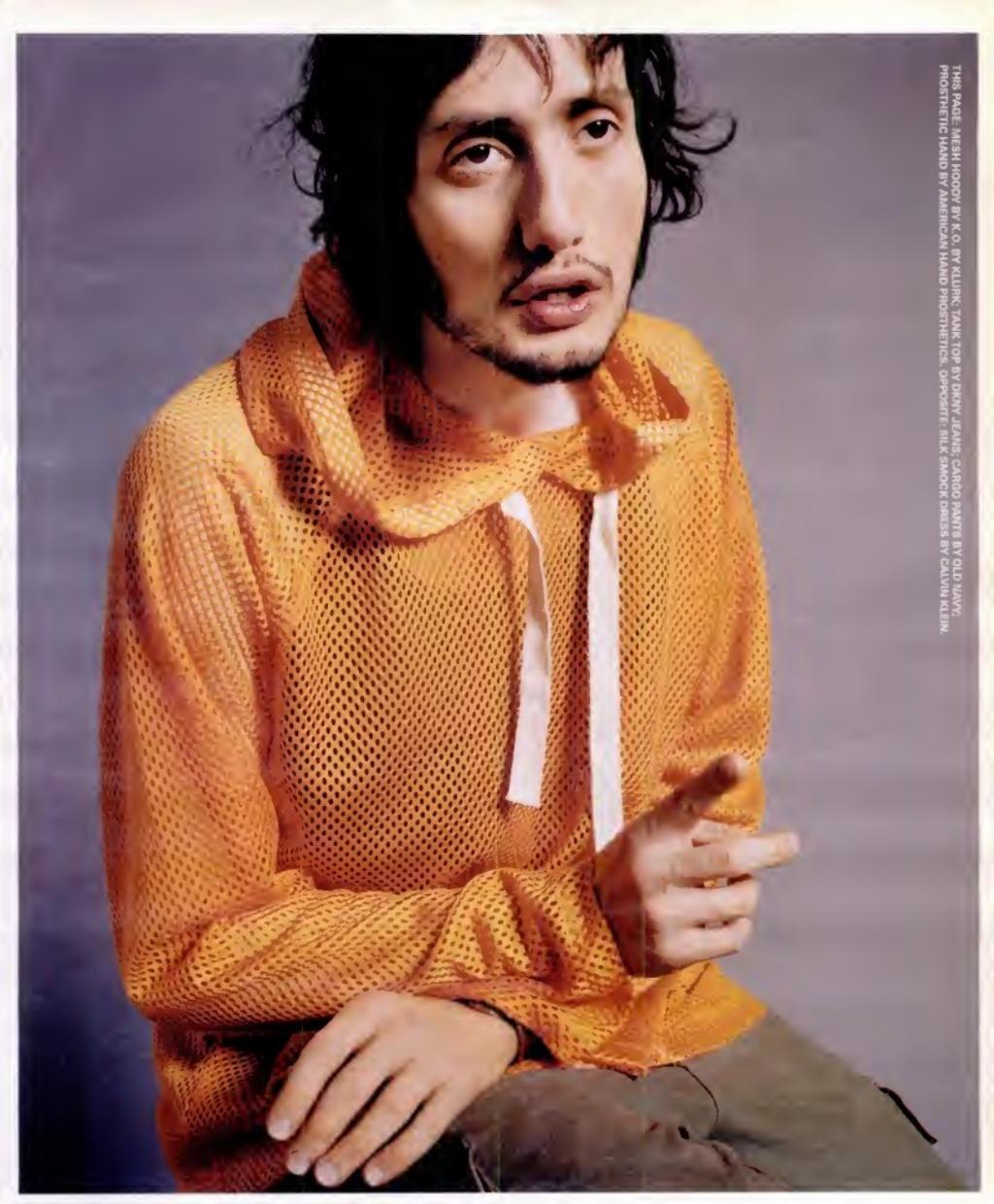
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THIS PAGE: LONG-SLEEVE SHIRT AND RECYCLED PANTY-HOSE HALTER DRESS BY JULYNEI  
OPPOSITE: COTTON ARMY SHIRT BY A.P.C., TANK TOP BY K.O. BY KLUNK.

Fashion Editor: Nolde Findley-Lewis





THIS PAGE: MESH HOODY BY K.O. BY KUURIE; TANK TOP BY DKNY; JEANS CARGO PANTS BY OLD NAVY.  
PROSTHETIC HAND BY AMERICAN HAND PROSTHETICS. OPPOSITE: SILK SMOCK DRESS BY CALVIN KLEIN.



THIS PAGE: SHIRT BY JOHN BARTLETT; WOOL PANTS BY CERRUTI 1881  
OPPOSITE: CRYSTAL PLASTIC FRAMED BY TONY YAMAMOTO; LINEN SHORTS BY PRADA.  
WHERE TO DINE: PAGE 141: PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW ZIEGLER; STYLING: STYLUS ABREU;  
LILA ROACH MAKEUP; DAIA CHODOROV FOR DOROTHY VALKINS; HAIR: PRODUCED BY CLOUTIER.  
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*A Toyota Prius after a 30 mph front impact collision. Source of photo:*



# RAY TRIPPING

Charles Ray's work is never what it seems, but it's almost always creepy. On the eve of Ray's first major retrospective, Darcey Steinke checks out the artist's weird science

Diving toward Hollywood in his truck, Charles Ray recalls a story his assistant once told him about snakes. In Mexico, Ray's assistant insisted, snakes fly through the air, and one species even drinks mother's milk. "The snake slithers into bed," Ray says, clearly pleased by this belief in the supernatural, "puts his tail in the baby's mouth, and latches onto the breast of the sleeping mother." As a sculptor, the 45-year-old Ray—whose remarkable work is the subject of a retrospective at New York City's Whitney Museum of American Art that begins this month—is known for messing with reality. In fact, he's something of a magician. "I want my work to reenchant the world," he says. You can see this magic in the work that put Ray on the map, a series of cubes done in the mid-'80s. In "Ink Box," the artist filled an open-topped black metal cube with ink. The surface looked so solid that at one gallery a guy set his hat down in the liquid. "It was an illusion," says Mike Kelley, a Los Angeles artist. "The urge to touch was overwhelming."

The sense that the rug is being pulled out from under you is a big part of Ray's work, as are things such as "space" and "form," which he meticulously skews to sometimes mind-blowing effect: A toy fire truck blown up life-size, a wooden table set for lunch with objects that slowly turn, a nuclear family whose members are the exact same size. They're all pieces Ray hopes "will create a fourth dimension in space." For his new "Unpainted Sculpture," the artist searched insurance yards for a totaled automobile. Eventually, he found a Pontiac Grand Am in which a woman had lost her life, then spent two years reconstructing the entire heap in fiberglass. The result is a ghost car: a ratiocinary object that's both ethereal and downright creepy (see facing page).

At his studio in Venice Beach, California, Ray tells me that, for his current project, he's creating an outfit almost identical to his everyday clothes. A Ray-made windbreaker, plaid shirt, and pair of jeans hang in a metal locker. The jeans are impressive—they look exactly like Levi's—and he's particularly proud of the cross-stitching at the crotch. Wearing them, Ray intends to make and star in a film which will run in New York theaters while the Whitney show is in progress. He whimsically thinks of the clothes as a space suit, as a way to slip into



**Reality Check:**  
from top, "No," one of  
Ray's self-portraits;  
skewing family values  
in "Family Romance";  
"Ink Box."

the dimensional space of the film itself. "For me," he says, "it will be sort of like a space walk."

Ray was born in Chicago, the second of six children, and spent his childhood in a two-flat apartment before his family moved to a house in suburban Winnetka. He had trouble tying his shoes, and, as a dyslexic, found the early years of school difficult. His father was a commercial artist, so there were always crayons and paper around the house. Ray calls his first drawings "typical kid stuff"—cars and bridges. He attended a military high school in Aurora, Illinois, and still winces when he recalls the cheaply constructed black cement buildings full of electric light.

At college at the University of Iowa, and then art school at Rutgers, Ray began experimenting with creative auto-exploitation. Early one morning at Rutgers, Ray managed to dislodge a big school clock from a hallway, removed the internal mechanism, and climbed inside. He moved the hands at the rate he thought appropriate. "When I got out at 6 P.M., " he deadpans, "it was really only four, so as a timepiece I wasn't accurate."

Ray's most definitive pieces may be his self-portraits. "Oh Charley, Charley, Charley..." for instance, has eight replicant Rays engaged in a variety of camel positions, a hilariously literal take on the phrase "go fuck yourself." While other artists often portray themselves as angst-ridden or cerebrally elite, Ray is more likely to show himself as a commercial dummy. In "Self-Portrait," he turns himself into a department store mannequin; and for the aptly titled "Male Mannequin," the artist attached a model of his own genitalia to a life-size doll.

Although critics often assert that Ray's work is about such trandy hot-button issues as identity politics and gender, Ray says he just wants his pieces to grab you. Ironically, this apparent lack of pretension in his artwork has made him a hit with pretentious art-world types. Being tapped for a retrospective at the way-voguish Whitney is not unlike the Rolling Stones asking you to open for them. While being flavor of the month worries him, Ray seems ready for art-world fame. "Giacometti was on the cover of every existential book for 20 years, but his sculptures still look great," he reasons. "I'm reevaluating. This thing about being provocative from the inside rather than the outside. I want more of that." ■

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# STATUTORY RAPE, A LOVE STORY

Many assume Mary Kay Letourneau—who was sent to jail for having sex with a 13-year-old—was driven by either insanity or evil. Matthew Stadler asks: What if it was something else entirely?



**M**ary Kay Letourneau serves her seven-and-a-half-year sentence for child rape in a prison that looks like a suburban high school surrounded by barbed wire. The day I visit her at the minimum-security correctional institution in Purdy, Washington, the prison lobby is filled with dogs and cats sent to board at a kennel run by inmates learning job skills. My visit, which Letourneau requested





Artist's rendering: a drawing made by 13-year-old Buddha during Latourneau's first "rape of a child" hearing.

a week earlier, was pushed back a few days after she announced she is pregnant—for a second time—by the now-14-year-old boy the state says she violated.

Latourneau is a 36-year-old mother, a devout Catholic, daughter of an arch-conservative former congressman, a bright, beautiful woman who fell in love with a 13-year-old boy. Before she was fired from Burien, Washington's Shorewood Elementary, she was the boy's sixth-grade teacher. He is a welfare kid, Samoan-American, artistically gifted, a bold child who—according to accounts on all sides—aggressively pursued her. In the midst of her failing marriage, Latourneau and the boy became best friends, confidants, then lovers. The courts called it rape and have jailed Latourneau and ordered her to never have contact with the boy whatsoever—for the rest of her life.

In the breach between these two positions—between teacher and pedophile, mother and seducer of children, lover and rapist—every stable tenet of our relations with children has been thrown into question. How can we reconcile the soft-spoken teacher and church-going mother with a woman capable of wanting, pursuing, and having sex with not just a teenager but a barely pubescent boy? Latourneau has been largely depicted as either evil or insane, she as the instigator and he as the victim. Latourneau, however, refuses to accept this narrative. She has told a court therapist she'd like to become "a spokesman for family values," and says of the boy, "He is the love of my life." The boy, digitized into shadow on TV, kept nameless in the press, says he wants to marry her.

The courts "were just hysterical about something that didn't exist," Latourneau says as we sit in the empty prison cafeteria at Purdy. "It's a political cause they're screaming about." Two months pregnant, planning to appeal her conviction, she pleads her case in a near-whisper. "The legal cause has nothing to do with the actualities of us and our families. They have no idea, and they've never asked, what really happened."

**N**ormandy Park is a middle-class suburb south of Seattle, where the hills spill down to Puget Sound, cut by ravines and thick with evergreens and Douglas fir. Beautiful from the air—flight paths cross directly over it—Normandy Park looks haphazard and incomplete from ground level. The hills are crisscrossed by dirt-shouldered roads and scarred by highways, framing a patchwork of houses, yards, and trees.

Mary Letourneau moved here in 1992, midsummer, with her husband, Steve, and three kids. She'd been teaching at Shorewood Elementary in nearby Burien for three years, and she and Steve thought they could turn two incomes (the loaded baggage for Alaska Airlines) into a nice house, nearer to their kids' school, with room for a new baby. Those who knew Letourneau tested her about her night-owl habits, impressed with the energy that kept her going, sometimes on just three or four hours of sleep a night. "I had a lot of projects for school," Letourneau says. "And I was raising four kids with a husband who was not always there."

By June of 1996, Mary Letourneau had become a familiar part of the neighborhood—caught up with projects and school, working sometimes 9 A.M. to 9 P.M., then coming home to care for her family. Steve was working odd hours as the young parents struggled with the costs of Catholic school for their kids and large house payments. At the same time, Steve and Mary's marriage was deteriorating. Letourneau says Steve was having an affair. (Steve refused to comment for this article.) "I'd been asking Steve for a divorce for several years," she says. "He has somewhat arbitrarily vowed he would never get divorced because his parents had. But we were essentially separated, and he had a girlfriend then. And I was well aware of that." In Normandy Park, however, no one took much notice.

On June 19, 1996, at one in the morning, all of that changed. The fight that filled the hours before midnight was nothing unusual for Mary and Steve; yelling and some threats. As was often the case that

The police report filed later that night begins: "At approximately 0110 hours, Marine Security Officer Shields advised dispatch that he had a possible DWI in the north lot of the Marina. He said the vehicle had driven over a planting strip and was slowly driving through the north lot." In the decimated language of the police that Letourneau would come to know so well, reporting officer R.K. Tschida described what he found in the parked van. "A white female quickly jumped up from the backseat and got into the driver's seat. I approached the driver's door. As I did I saw a white male juvenile laying in the back. I asked the driver (Letourneau, Mary Katherine WF 013062) if she was okay and why she was driving around in the north lot of the Marina after hours."

"I asked Letourneau to step out of the vehicle," continues Tschida, who was joined by Shields and two more officers. "She told me that the male in the back was a friend who was staying with her. I asked her how old he was. She hesitated for a moment and said 18. While I was talking to Letourneau, Officer Neibush talked to the male. Officer Neibush said the male was 14. When Letourneau got out of the vehicle I noticed that she was wearing a coat over a T-shirt but was bare-legged below the T-shirt. I didn't notice if she was wearing anything else and I didn't ask her."

The four policemen questioned the pair separately, hearing from both that she was his schoolteacher and that he was staying at her house. After several hours with the police and a phone call to the boy's mother—who confirmed the story and asked that they let her son go back to the Letourneus—Mary and the boy went home.

The police report is interesting not only because it is the first instance where the relationship between Mary Kay Letourneau and her former student enters into the public record but also for its constrained, careful language. Whether the two were having sex remains to this day unclear. But as the senior officer on the scene put it to Letourneau at one point, "Based upon the circumstances, there is an appearance of impropriety."



Muscle Beach

Volume: 7.5

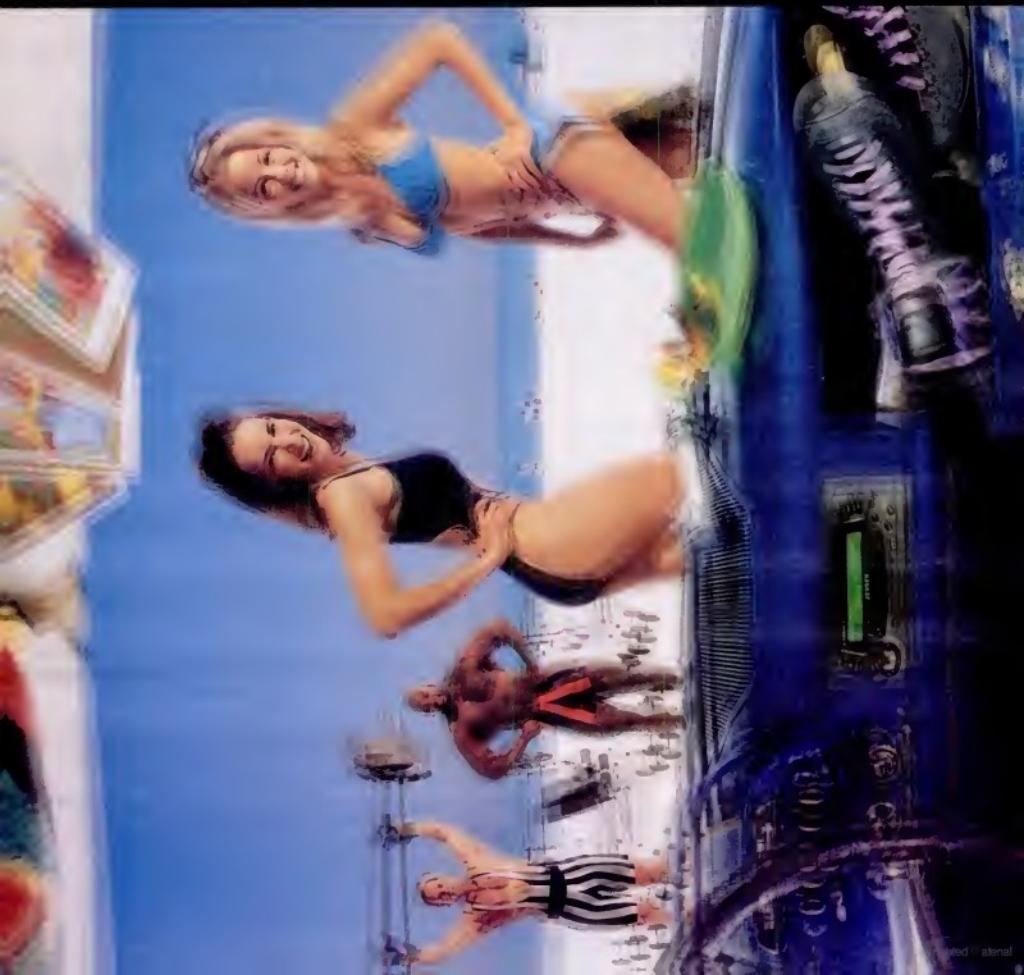
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"In this emotional state, she 'allowed' the intercourse to happen," read the presentence investigation records.

"By this time she was now sexually aroused, and the intercourse was mutual.... She commented he was 'obviously experienced; he knew what he was doing'"

The "young men," as Letourneau insists he should be called, was by everyone's account an extremely unusual 12-year-old. Pubescent since the age of ten, he grew up in a large, extended family with his mother, three older siblings, and scores of relatives held together by the Catholic church and the habitual generosity of the Samoan culture from which his family comes. His father had already left them in Hawaii and since has been arrested for battery and false imprisonment. Currently serving time in a Texas prison, the boy's father claims to have 18 children by six women.

Letourneau taught the boy in second grade. Four years later the boy said he could see then, at age eight, that she was unhappy with Steve. This sounds like the same kind of preteen bravado that had him telling Letourneau, his sixth-grade teacher, "I have something in my pocket for you." That bravado, combined with a talent for drawing and poetry (remarked on by almost every adult who knows him), was enough to impress the boy's precocious upon his teacher.

Sometimes dependent on food stamps and welfare, the boy's mother balanced multiple jobs with work-study and church, and in 1996 finally made her divorce official. That same summer, the boy, her youngest, took an art class at a local community college, together with his teacher, Letourneau. In a poem he wrote for that year's yearbook, he describes himself as "truthful, grateful, and a strong warrior / Son of a great queen... / Who fears nothing but endings, and sad stories... / Who likes to wear masks over his soul." Next to the poem was the unremarkable drawing—a peace to pop music with a dreadlocked punk guitar god on a pedestal of CDs, the dreads labeled "Nirvana," "Green Day," "Bush," "Presidents," "Alantis" [sic]. This familiar picture of young adolescence is complicated by the boy's later arrest, last year, for second-degree robbery (an incident his lawyer dismisses as "stupid kid stuff"); suspensions, this year, for smoking and poor attendance; and a Child Protective Service report citing his mother for beating him, an allegation the boy denies.

The report clashes with the thoughtful figure Soone, the boy's mother, has presented on those occasions when she's spoken in public. In court and on television, Soone has explained that her boy is "an old soul" who "loves Mary." She refers to her faith in God and her insistence on forgiving Letourneau for any transgressions—her secrecy, her violation of trust—because Jesus has forgiven all sinners. She puts the couple's new baby, Audrey, ahead of all other contingencies and has asked that Letourneau be released in order to raise Audrey. In this, and in her deep religious faith, lie the strongest bonds between Soone and Letourneau, a woman who became the unlikely mentor and lover of Soone's youngest son.

In the fall of 1995 the boy, nicknamed "Buddha," entered Letourneau's sixth-grade class. Letourneau knew him well, both as his teacher and as the head of countless school projects to which Buddha contributed his artistic talents. Buddha was always

involved, sometimes staying late with Letourneau to work on them, then returning to her home. He later told King County police he began flirting with Letourneau during these fall and winter months, teasing her about her clothes, and at one point making her cry by disrupting the class so persistently she had to take him to the office.

Firting soon became a boyish crush, mentioned by Soone that fell at a conference with Letourneau. Letourneau "took it as a compliment." Fueled by Letourneau's deep admiration for Buddha and an apparent absence of any line between the passions of teaching and love, their wordless *folie à deux* continued, played out in classroom glances and the endless artistic projects both enjoyed pursuing.

Letourneau began trying to include Buddha in her family, taking him with her younger daughter into Seattle that winter to visit an art gallery and bookstore. Tina Bernstein, a next-door neighbor, never met Buddha but remembers, "My kids just didn't like him, they didn't like to go over when he was there. He smoked and used foul language, and my kids didn't like that. He was a little scary for them." Letourneau encouraged her oldest, 12-year-old Steve, Jr., to form a friendship with Buddha, but the two had little in common.

By now, Letourneau had made it clear she didn't want to have sex with Steve anymore. At school one day, an encounter between Steve and Buddha was so disturbing, one of Letourneau's students reported back to her teacher, "One of the girls in the class," says Letourneau, "came up to me and said, 'I don't know what to think about what I just saw, but your husband came in the room, and the two of them [Steve and Buddha] looked eyes like I had never seen two people before.'"

Buddha articulated his desire through tapes, compilations he'd put together, special songs to give to his teacher. "A lot of them were very suggestive," Letourneau points out. Later, when Steve gave Mary's papers to police as evidence, they found long lists of romantic songs (with one note saying, "All of the love songs seem to have been written for us"), among them, belied by Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, and Mariah Carey.

By spring, Buddha was staying at Letourneau's home until two or three in the morning, and on some occasions all night, working on the yearbook. Letourneau knew he had developed intense romantic feelings for her—during one phone call she told her explicitly that he loved her—and she remembers feeling a deep ambivalence, an awareness that she was "an instrumental person" in Buddha's move toward adulthood without any clue how her role should take shape.

The clinical language of the presentence investigation records how the dominoes fell during the summer of 1996: "He had written a poem that implied he wanted to make love to her and had a plan for their next home visit. [Buddha] approached her and kissed her in the car, in what she described as 'a romantic kiss.... She believed they could have the kiss and nothing more would come of it.... [Buddha] stayed overnight at her house once more when the two of

them fell asleep in their chairs after a long talk.... He asked her to come and sit next to him and she complied. He held her and she could feel that he was aroused.... She then made the decision to 'relieve him of this forcefulness'.... Ms. Letourneau then went down and placed her mouth on his penis 'to finish him so he would not have those feelings'.... She stated that he climaxed, but did not touch her in any way other than to hold her.... She described that incident as 'the beginning of the end'.... They ended up laying on the couch together with Buddha on top of her, pushing himself against her.... In this emotional state, before too long, she 'allow[ed]' the intercourse to happen. By this time she was now sexually aroused, and the intercourse was mutual.... She commented he was 'obviously experienced; he knew what he was doing....'

By the beginning of school in the fall, Letourneau was pregnant with the child of her 13-year-old lover.

Mary Kay Letourneau grew up one of six children of John Schmitz, a community college teacher and an arch-conservative congressman who ran for President in 1972, and his ambitious wife. Like many Catholic families, it was a strict household. Young Mary was shuttled from one Catholic school to another in order to avoid sex education classes. Her mother—who made frequent appearances on national television shows to speak out against the Equal Rights Amendment—was intent on controlling the terms of her children's introduction to sex. The parents, however, were eventually undermined by the children. According to therapist reports prepared for court proceedings, Letourneau maintains that during the years in Washington, D.C., she and a brother had a periodic sexual relationship, primarily fondling and foreplay. After two years, Letourneau asked that it stop, and it did.

The facade of respectable family and church values came crashing down in 1982 when John Schmitz was accused of fathering two children by a mistress—a former student—he'd kept secret from his family. Letourneau doesn't talk about that time now, though clearly she forgave him, as did his wife, Today, Letourneau calls her father "the man in my life," and, among her family, remains close only to him.

While the pressure of this highly competitive, demanding family drove Mary to pursue sometimes risky experiences during her teen years, she nevertheless held on to Catholicism and her faith in family. By the time she got to college at Arizona State University and became pregnant by a fellow student she met at a frat party, Mary was ready to keep the child and marry the father, Steve Letourneau. The couple moved to Alaska, where Steve's family lived, within a year—when Steve was transferred by the airline he still works for—they settled in Seattle.

The Letourneaus' marriage always had its difficulties, but in October 1996, it went into a crisis. That month, Letourneau learned she was pregnant, and knew the baby wasn't Steve's. Isolated in the private language

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**Man, wife, home:** from left, Steve Letourneau, Mary Letourneau, and the minimum-security prison where Mary is serving out the remainder of her sentence.



of her relationship with Buddha, she found it impossible to speak about her predicament with anyone.

During these same months, financial pressures were closing in and the Letourneau's knew they were going to lose their house. Letourneau says it was about this time that Steve's mistress left him. "That's when he turned," says Letourneau. "That's when he started digging up anything he could on my business." He didn't have far to dig. With Buddha staying over at least once a week and the evidence Steve found in Mary's journals and notes, it quickly became obvious what was going on.

The months that followed were filled with anger and hesitation that exposed the couple's children to some of the worst traumas of the whole affair. Police were repeatedly called to the Letourneau's that winter. "Steven wanted me to miscarry," Letourneau maintains. "He knew that I was prone to it, and he'd get rough with me, hoping I'd miscarry the baby."

These blow-ups, however, were rare, and no arrests were ever made. "This was not a pattern with Steve; he was not an abusive man," says Letourneau. "But all of his insecurities were being hit upon at once. Steve took it as a man-to-man jealousy thing; he saw [Buddha] as a rival. One time, he even asked me in a rage, 'Was he bigger than me?' meaning sexually."

Mary and Steve recognized divorce was inevitable and began looking at ways to get it done without hurting the children. Finally Letourneau summoned the courage to tell her parents about Buddha, and John Schmitz's first question, she says, was, "Do you love him?" Letourneau's notes to Buddha, given to the police as evidence, record an anguished aftermath to that conversation: "They are happy for me and the baby, said I could live there if I needed to leave for a while. They think I also could be in big serious legal trouble. Maybe I already am under investigation and don't know it yet. I need a plan and a life-and-death promise from you about this. You don't need to do anything except promise on your life not to ever, ever, no matter how someone questions you, to ever tell about us—now even a kiss can be told."

In this period, Latourneau's notes abandon the dreams of romance songs and favorite movies and plunge into a wrenching insecurity about her future with Buddha. Page after page is composed of plans and lists, sets of rules ("Stay clean, stay true, stay up, stay creating") and demands whose simple urgency is devastating. "I need to know where you keep it all up," reads one note. "I need to know that every day you're going to remember the 'up life' no matter what craziness is happening around you.... Sometimes you could call me. And on the days when you're in the 'up life' you could just remember to say thank you—not to me but to you-know-who up there."

The presence of these notes in an evidence file raises the question, What could these anxious dispatches be evidence of? To encounter them—the urgent handwriting xeroxed, as if frozen in amber, crazy lines wrapping around themselves to fill the

marginated, in the midst of the carefully boxed and bracketed form-filling that makes up the bulk of the state's case—is like seeing a human face surface for one brief panicked moment in the brackish water of a swamp, before it sinks again from view. These notes mark the presence of something furtive and difficult to read, the language of the human heart trapped inside a system of inquiry that cannot hear it except as symptomatic, as evidence. On these notes psychologists, those forensic scientists of the soul, could find the source of a crime: delusion, obsession, childhood trauma. Or the defense could point to a mitigating circumstance: insanity, disorganization. But nothing is more sad than these notes—the face of a broken and loving woman calling out—and the knowledge that her writing them will only be used as evidence to confirm her guilt while we watch her drown.

In February, Steve Letourneau drove to Buddha's home and confronted him. According to a police description of the incident, "Steve came to his house, knocked on the door, and asked him to come outside saying he wanted to talk to him. Steve then asked [Buddha] 'he and Mary' were having an affair and [Buddha] told Steve that they had. [Detective] Whisman asked if Steve had threatened him and [Buddha] said no, that he was very mad but didn't threaten him or anything.... [Buddha] said Steve told him that if this didn't stop that he would tell the police and [Buddha's] mother." Letourneau recalls the incident in different terms: "Steve called him outside and said 'She's mine forever,' and [Buddha] looked at him and said 'Not a chance, buddy.'"

Working with their priest, Steve and Mery finally began looking for a way out. Mary was seriously considering an offer to go back to Washington, D.C., taking the kids with her, but it was still the middle of the school year. Word spread in Steve's family that something awful was going on in their relationship, and Steve was under pressure to get himself out of the marriage as quickly as possible.

Around this time, Letourneau says she was on the verge of telling Soone, Buddha's mother. "I was at church with Soone, and I was going to tell her. I felt she had a right to know she had a grandbaby coming, not so much that she should know her son was sexually involved, but that she had a grandbaby. But I realized it wasn't the right time at all, so I didn't tell her that day."

By then, Steve's relatives had heard the truth. "We sat out in the hot tub five hours, just sick to our stomachs," says a relative who lived nearby. "They were the picture-perfect family in everyone's eyes. Kids all mannered. I think closer family members knew that there was a different side to them but not so much, as, you know. So February 25, my birthday, I called Child Protective Services. They told me to call the school district because she was a teacher."

Mary Letourneau was arrested at school on February 26, 1997. After interrogating Buddha that morning at

his middle school and calling his mother—Buddha told police, "She's gonna kick my ass"—Detective Pat Maley arrested Letourneau at 4:30 in the afternoon. Letourneau declined to give Meley any statement in her own defense.

The police brought Letaoumeau back home with instructions to avoid all contact with Buddha and his family, an order she violated at once, phoning Soona and asking to meet her two days later. Reporting their conversation, Soona told Detective Maley, "Mary really needs help because I think she's living in a fantasy land." Letaoumeau's notes show she was, at the very least, living in extreme isolation. She was backed into a corner where she could speak frankly to no one except the young teen she'd chosen as her lover, a boy whom she increasingly tried to instruct through lists of rules and "what I need from you," hoping he could help her to navigate her fractured life.

Tina Bernstein found out about her neighbor in the next day's paper. "I went over with some flowers, and I hadn't seen her for a long time, and I was thinking she was set up or something," says Bernstein. "I knew who the kid was, but I didn't say anything about that when I went over. I just gave her the flowers and said, 'I think we need a little sunshine around here.' I made a little joke. She gave me a big hug and we just cried."

**L**eotumaua asked Dave Gehrk, a friend of Tina Bernstein's husband, Lee, for help, and the 49-year-old lawyer sat down with her to outline the legal options. "Mary first wanted to know if I thought she was a pervert," says Gehrk, a father of two boys. "I told her no, in a lot of cultures and a lot of different eras it was perfectly normal, legal, and encouraged. Even in our own country, today, it's treated so differently."

Letourneau had no interest in making Buddha take the stand in a trial and agreed with Gehrk's advice to plead guilty. She asked Gehrk about sentencing options. "It was important that she only be charged with rape of a child in the second degree, two counts," Gehrk says. "That would keep her sentence below 9 months and make her eligible for the treatment programs."

Washington state has pioneered a number of innovations in the punishment and treatment of convicted sex offenders. Since 1990, when the brutal maiming of one boy and the murder of two more by released sex offenders triggered public hearings and calls for harsher laws, the state has introduced community notification (later passed in New Jersey as Megan's Law) and mandatory, indefinite incarceration and treatment for sex offenders who finish their sentences but are deemed "predatory." In 1984, a sentencing option called the Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative was put in place. SSSOA allows "non-predatory offenders" who are judged to be amenable to therapies to stay in the community under strict guidelines: completion of a special sex offender treatment program and no contact with



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The aftermath: left, a sign outside the school where the community gathered; above, Letourneau holds Audrey, her first child by 13-year-old Buddha.



potential victims. "Non-predatory" offenders are deemed eligible for this program if the court decides they have a mental problem that is treatable by therapy, and that the offender acknowledges his or her offense and desires treatment. Remorse, an ability to describe the crime and victim in the appropriate terms, and a self-image that is in keeping with the court or treatment-provider's image of the perpetrator, are important ingredients in establishing an offender's eligibility.

The first step, after Letourneau's arrest, was getting her into such a program. "I still didn't care to justify my relationship," Letourneau says, recalling her first visit to an evaluator. "Who can justify love or any of their strongest relationships? These are simply things which cannot, which don't need to be defended or explained."

Marsha Macy, a therapist working near Normandy Park, was putting together the state's first women's sex offender group. She had two female offenders and needed a third, and so was eager to have Letourneau. Washington's entire sex offender program is designed for male offenders, and standard therapies rely on the use of a polygraphomograph, a metal ring placed around the penis to measure arousal. The "specialized intensive sexual deviancy treatment program" Macy eventually recommended for Letourneau included weekly group therapy, individual treatment every other week, polygraph exams every three to six months, marathon group sessions every quarter, cognitive restructuring, and "behavior modification" treatments such as "minimal arousal conditioning," aversion treatment, and covert sensitization."

"Aversion treatments," according to state guidelines, include "techniques in which arousal to stimuli depicting sexual abuse is paired with a noxious odor." Put plainly, the offender is shown dirty pictures, then doused with a horrible odor if she indicates any positive response. "Covert sensitization" works similarly, sometimes substituting mild electric shocks for the odors, while "arousal conditioning" usually requires weekly periods of masturbation—performed while narrating putatively appropriate and then inappropriate sexual fantasies out loud, all of which is recorded on tape and reviewed by doctors.

These and other techniques used in the predatory offenders programs presume a male offender, and much of the psychology presumes patterns of aggression, denial, guilt, and remorse that are more typically male. Similarly, most victims are presumed to be female. Letourneau's "rape of a child" was fairly atypical. In fact, a 1987 study indicates that a "victim" like Buddha—a boy who believes he consented—is likely to have a long-term positive assessment of the sexual relationship.

**W**ith Dave Gehrke's help, Mary Kay Letourneau managed to complete enough testing to be evaluated by five different therapists during the summer while she awaited sentencing. Letourneau's home and family were in shamb-

bles, a silent, puzzled group of shipwrecked survivors who passed their days in the Normandy Park house—now for sale—watching and waiting. Under court orders to "not reside in the same home as her minor children," Letourneau took to sleeping in the car, parked outside, so she'd be there to take care of the kids when she could without violating the terms of her release. The kids were shuttled in and out, and soon after the school year ended, each of the four went to live with relatives while their future got sorted out.

Out in the world, the press was presenting a number of Mary Kay Letourneau, as the details of her liaison and remorselessness were made clear. Mary the schoolroom seducer was the first shadow to be cast in the brief reports after her arrest. But as June turned to July and Letourneau gave birth to Audrey, the couple's baby, a second, fuzzier shadow emerged: an image of a loving mother and devoted teacher who'd gotten caught up in circumstances she couldn't control. Letourneau allowed Ron Fitter, a reporter for the *Seattle Times*, to spend time at home with her and Audrey, telling him secrets she'd earlier kept to herself so that he could make this more sympathetic character clearer. The pictures of Letourneau on the *Seattle Times'* front page, sitting amidst the partially packed boxes in her empty house, holding baby Audrey, powerfully displaced the profile of the molester in jailhouse clothes that had been standard fare before then.

Gehrke also recruited another lawyer, his friend Robert Huff, to act as a kind of literary agent and media advisor to both Letourneau and the family of Buddha. Among the calls he fielded was one from Steve Chang, a producer for *Dateline*. Chang wanted to give Letourneau and Buddha the chance to speak and explain what had happened. Letourneau agreed, and the segment was shot in Dave Gehrke's house the night before she was due to plead guilty and go to jail.

"With her guilty plea, the media just went crazy," Gehrke says. "They'd call or fax—Jerry Springer, Montel Williams, all the talk shows—saying, 'Wow, we want to do the Mary story. We'll come up; we'll fly her down; we'll put her up. It's a great story, we want to do it.' The small law office was swamped with offers. 'We got specially printed slick brochures with film offers, talking about the company and the principals and what they were going to do; people interested in a low story; several French magazines; radio from Argentina, Colombia, TV from Brazil, Germany. As a legal tactic we wanted some coverage to humanize this 'child rapist,' to show this is a real person with real concerns and feelings. And with some, like *Dateline*, that's what we got." For Letourneau, bartering glimpses of her "humanity" had become an essential legal strategy.

**B**uddha had all but disappeared from view as he and Letourneau were displaced by the media's image of their affair. He appeared once on the *Todays* show, stating that he loved her and did not like being called a victim, and he spoke often with the *Seattle Times*. But the relationship was more completely hidden and private than it had ever been before the arrest. Their times together were orchestrated and fleeting—Buddha's visit to the hospital when Letourneau delivered, meetings monitored by Soons or the lawyers—and their feelings about one another had gone entirely underground, unexpressed even to each other. There was no school, no projects, no tapes, no all-night videos or conversation, no "forever love."

Buddha had regular counseling and went back to school in the fall, where he quickly got into trouble for smoking and skipping class. A conflict one evening between another kid and Buddha and his brother ended in Buddha's arrest for second-degree robbery. At home, he helped his mom and older sister take care of Audrey, while their lawyer, Bob Huff, dealt with the press. In one incident, Huff filed suit on behalf of the family charging Seattle's KIRO-TV with invasion of privacy and false imprisonment after a news crew picked up Buddha at home and took him to a local park for an interview.

On November 14, 1997, Judge Linda Lau convened her oft-delayed sentencing hearing, and the end finally seemed near. The hearing promised to put a period at the end of a great series of hesitations, but it became an almost caricatured battle of defense and prosecution therapists. Dr. Julia Moore, for the defense, brandishing a hand-drawn chart of "bipolar cycles," breathlessly catalogued the "euphoria, elation, expansiveness, problems with boundaries, over-involvement in other people's lives" that constituted the "pure mania [Letourneau had] during their relationship." Moore was pitted against the gray, somber Dr. Richard Wheeler. Using a set of preprinted charts, he ticked off the 11 criteria for "sex offender eligibility determination" and pointed out that Letourneau's wish to become a spokeswoman for female victims displayed "a severe cognitive impairment." Ultimately, Judge Lau ruled Letourneau is bipolar, as Moore contended, and so was eligible for treatment. Her sentence: 80 more days in jail, release into the community by early January, and treatment for three years.

The elation of Letourneau's friends was matched only by the swiftness with which they took up Moore's bipolar diagnosis. All of them—from childhood friends Michelle Jarvis and Caroline Schuster, to Tim Bernstein and David Gehrke—confirmed the

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logic and acuity of this simple explanation. Dr. Moore had put a frame around the once-fuzzy image of poor Mary Letourneau, and now everyone seemed able to view her clearly.

**M**ary Letourneau was released into the community this past January and went at once to her new home in south Seattle, a cottage she shared with fellow taschaar Beth Adair. Adair had defended Letourneau at school during the months other teachers turned against her. She had kept in touch, letting Letourneau know how her students were faring, and passing along occasional information about Buddha's mental state. Adair was close friends with Buddha's family, and often went with Soona and baby Audrey to visit Letourneau in jail. She told the court in August that Letourneau "did not manipulate anyone"; Steva's mistreatment of Letourneau forced her to reach out to Buddha "for understanding and caring."

Letourneau was given 24 hours to register as a sex offender—a lifelong requirement for anyone convicted of such a crime in Washington. She registered in a locked office of the King County courthouse while the media swarmed outside. "That night," says a friend who accompanied Letourneau to the courthouse, "the cameras were out at [Beth Adair's] house. They'd located it and were all gathered on the street outside. Beth's daughter, who's 19, and Letourneau put on long baggy pants and sweatshirts and funny hats and all, so they looked like punk 14-year-old kids, and they went outside with skateboards and just sat on the

curb by all the cameras, watching them."

By all accounts, including that of her doctor, the euphoria of her release had quickly taken Letourneau into a "hypomanic" state, which Dr. Moore says is marked by extreme, unrealistic confidence and risk-taking. Letourneau was prescribed Depakote to temper her euphoria; Dave Gehrk observed that a just few weeks on Depakote had made Letourneau "much more realistic." But Letourneau soon stopped taking the medication, complaining that Depakote was causing hair loss and other side effects. "I kept pushing for her to accept conventional treatment with lithium," her psychiatrist later told the court. "But I felt Mary was in a hypomanic state and I was trying to get her on meds with as little adversarial action as possible."

Gehrk, anticipating the hazards of these first weeks, wrote a letter to Letourneau's friends and family asking them to help her succeed at the sex offender program. "I knew it wasn't going to be easy," says Gehrk. "One problem was that Mary had by then gotten this little fan club of new friends who kept talking her it was love and she was a martyr and basically setting her up for failure." One of Letourneau's new friends, a woman whom she met as a visitor in jail that summer, arranged to get a pager for Letourneau and then passed the number along to Buddha. Soon after Letourneau's release, the couple was back together.

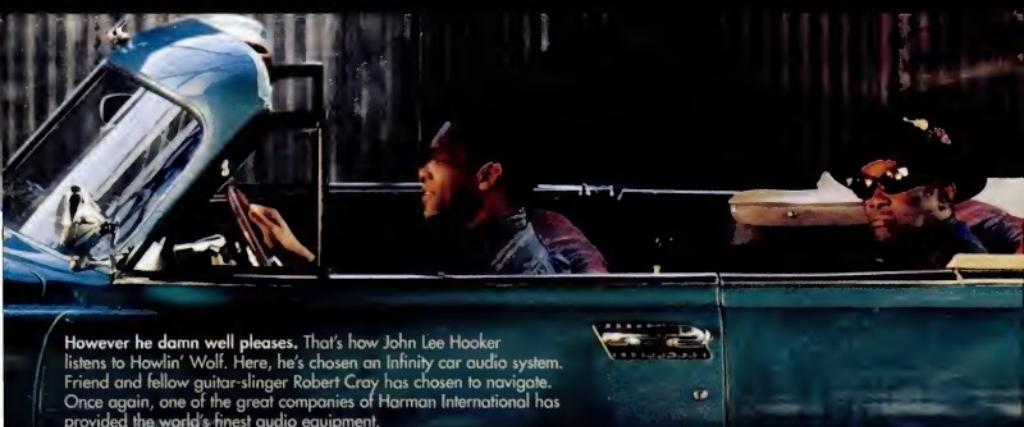
With her new friend from the jail, Letourneau spent evenings out at movies, shopping (she spent \$850 in two weeks, buying clothes for Buddha and

baby Audrey), and sometimes going to bars. "We went up near the university one time," her friend says, "and the guy at this club carded us, which was flattering. I just said, 'Two more years and I'll be legal,' you know, as a joke, and Letourneau laughed and said to him, 'Yeah, and my boyfriend is 14 years old.' He looked at her and said, 'Lucky guy.'"

Letourneau and Buddha went on walks and to the movies, seeing their favorite, *Titanic*, a number of times and staying together as long as they could manage. By the end of January, the couple was finding enough time alone to start having sex again. Every friend who would speak about it said they had no idea Letourneau and Buddha had gotten back together. One says attorney Bob Huff actually encouraged these reunions in the hopes of triggering a violation and rearrest—so that the press and film offers would be sweetened—a claim that Huff denies. But this sort of wild accusation was the coin of the realm in the increasingly contentious rivalries that now swirled around Letourneau. Her story, her friendship—Letourneau herself—had become redeatable, a currency it seemed everyone wanted a piece of.

**O**n February 2, three days after her 36th birthday, Mary Letourneau was paged again by Buddha. He said he had to see her; he was in trouble and didn't want to go back home. Letourneau picked him up in White Center, a Seattle neighborhood just north of Burien, and drove out to the Oek Tree Cinemas in the city's north end. In the car,

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Letouneau had a lot of clothes, piles from her compulsive shopping with her friend, plus some gifts for Buddha and for Audrey. In the backseat, a strongbox held \$6,200 of her savings—another of her friend's ideas (in case the court put any kind of lien on Letouneau for "damages" or court costs). In front, beneath the driver's side floor mat, Letouneau kept her passport. The couple bought beer and snacks at Larry's Supermarket, then went next door to see the late movie before driving back to Adair's house.

That evening, for what might have been the last time, Letouneau took refuge in the fantasy of "forever love," her hopes for "the up life," and a romance to rival *Titanic* or *Braveheart*—the epics that were her best, perhaps only, model of true love. More modest fantasies must have seemed to her indescribably puny, incommensurable with the scope of her passion, or too weak to justify action. And so an unusually talented boy became, in Letouneau's eyes, "a Picasso protégé"; a difficult, desired liaison became "forever love."

They sat out in the car and held each other. Letouneau told Buddha he had to go home to his baby and his mother, but he stayed. Hours passed, as they had on so many long evenings in the past. It got to be 1 A.M., and then two. In the quiet Seattle neighborhood, the houses were dark and no cars were out; save a police car on routine patrols. At 3 A.M., a patrolman came across Letouneau's parked car, its windows steamed, and saw the shadows of two people inside of it. He knocked on the driver's side door to ask if anything was wrong.

The police arrested Letouneau for violating the

terms of her release as she sat in the car with Buddha outside Beth Adair's house. A friend of Letouneau's recalls, "Beth called me at three in the morning, crying on the phone and saying the police were out there and she'd heard an officer saying, 'Young man, get back in the car,' and she said, 'Mary is out there, the police are arresting Mary.' I just didn't believe it, I couldn't believe it."

On the morning of February 6, Letouneau sat, drawn and fidgeting, in jailhouse clothes, in Judge Lau's courtroom. In Washington, D.C., President Clinton was busy defending himself against allegations he'd forced sex on a young intern. TV stations in Seattle jumped back and forth between the Presidential news conference and Letouneau's resuscitating. Dave Gehrkne listened and scribbled notes. Letouneau stared, bit her lip, and let her head fall to one side. There was no drama, only the dull monotony of prosecutor Linda Johnson extracting layer upon layer of evidence from Seattle Detective Dane Bean—information so meticulously stripped of subjectivity, so entirely divorced from intent, desire, or passion, it could stand up in court, unbreachable.

Letouneau was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years at Purdy and ordered never to have contact with Buddha for the rest of her life.

**A**t the plain Formica table in the prison cafeteria at Purdy, Mary Letouneau, two months pregnant, looking forward to her new baby, speaks in a near-whisper. "I asked one of the therapists about this idea that [Buddha] and I had a 'shared

delusion' and he told me, 'Everybody's love is delusional,'" she says. "You and he share the same delusion. That's part of love."

Letouneau wants to keep her new baby, but the state says it will take possession of the child after it is born and place it with a family, possibly Buddha's. Letouneau says she's a fit mother whose dearest wish is to be with her kids.

Her oldest, 13-year-old Steve, Jr., pleaded with her on the phone from Alaska, days before her hearing, wanting to see her, miserable and threatening suicide. Buddha is in and out of his home, in trouble with the police, suspended from school. Soon, Buddha's mother, still working two jobs, takes care of Audrey.

Tina Bernstein says she hopes to go down to Purdy and visit Letouneau. "I just haven't gotten around to it," says Bernstein. She wishes her kids could see Letouneau again but knows they never will. "Every now and then they ask why Mary Kay is in jail and we just kind of smooth it over. They think the world of Mary Kay, and my daughter, she's eight, said one day, 'They put her in jail because she's so nice to kids, didn't they?' And I just said, 'Oh my God.' And now my little one, my six-year-old son, sometimes when we've done something really special as a family, he says to me, 'Mom, I'm scared because of all the nice things you do for us, they're going to take you away and put you in jail like Mary Kay. That's the only way he can make sense of it.'" ■

Additional research by David Kihara

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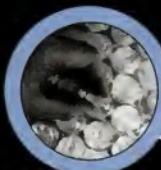
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- B. waist
- C. legs
- D. inseam



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## Step 2

## Draw



## Step 3

## Cut



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## DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

# Original Sinner

On her poppiest album in years, Tori Amos is still trying to lose her religion. by Sarah Vowell



**Tori Amos**

*From the Choirgirl Hotel* (Atlantic)

One of the most encouraging moments in recent memory was that week a couple of years ago when Jesus appeared on the cover of all three of America's major news magazines. The fact that God is still a cover story so late in the millennium is good news indeed, at least from a rock 'n' roll-will-never-die (or-will-it?) perspective. Because once you get rid of God, religion goes too. And without religion and its rules, what is there to rebel against? Without preachers, there are no preacher's daughters; no Torah—no Tori.

Tori Amos: Southerner, Pianist, Loser of Religion. More than any singer-songwriter of her generation, this minister's child carries on the memory of rock's creation myth, that part of the genre born of Pentecostal passion and slave sadness. You can trace a line from the Holy Ghost shake of Elvis Presley's hips to the point-blank heresy in Amos's lyrics. She scolds God ("You need a woman to look after you"), rejects communion for masturbation ("When they say 'take of his body / I think I'll take from mine instead"), and calls Lucifer "Father." And for all her excellent covers of Led Zeppelin or the Stones or even "Smells Like Teen Spirit," it's almost disappointing that this piano-playing Jerry Leeann hasn't yet recorded "Great Balls of Fire."

Nominalists think of losing your religion like it's losing weight. It's not. The loss of faith leaves a hole behind. You never get rid of spiritual need. For pop music, it's a very useful void. Even when she's not singing about religion—and on her new album, *From the Choirgirl Hotel*, she barely does at all—Amos achieves a kind of ecstatic holiness in song. She's that rare rocker who can build a racket out of dissonance but through euphonious intensity.

"I guess you go too far / When pianos try to be guitars," Amos sings in "Northern Lad." Miraculously, Amos can convince you pianos are better than guitars for minutes at a time, even when pianos are at their most pianissimo. Despite her punk sense of spite, Amos, who honed her choppy playing piano bars as

Biting the Apple: Tori in post-Rona image makeover.

## reviews

The image shows the front cover of the Garbage album "Version 2.0". The background is a textured orange surface. The word "garbage" is written in large, white, serif capital letters. Above it, "Version 2.0" is written in smaller, white, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom, the words "in stores now" are printed in a small, white, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small logo for "ALMO".

Version 2.0

garbage

in stores now

ALMO

a teen, often channels the spirit of schmaltz, which is why it took me years (and facing up to the memories of a decidedly uncool musical past) to like her. Even though my favorite album from the '70s is *Modern Lovers*, I admit my favorite album during the '70s was *You Light Up My Life*. And what girl won't get the secret Debby Boone shivers from Amos's "Jackie's Strength"? It's a nice old-fashioned ballad with string accompaniment and would be the perfect wedding song except for that relevant-though-inappropriate line about "my bridesmaids getting laid."

Maybe the gift of a Christian girlhood is also its chains. Sex has consequence. Which is why Amos's love songs are always so fraught with danger. Because what's sexier than danger? On *From the Choirgirl Hotel*, sex isn't so much a word as a sound, slithering from the murky, trip-hopped-up "Cruel" to the speaking-in-tongue-kisses funk of "Raspberry Swift," in which a male suitor is advised, "If you want inside her / Well, boy, you better make her raspberry swirl." And in this, the year that's turning into sex addiction's big moment in the sun, who can resist a lurching rocker called "She's Your Cocaine"? It's got everything you want from Tori: daili references, an angelic bridge worthy of the choirgirl in the album title, and that Amos trademark orgasmic shrieking that makes faking it sound like so much fun.

*Choirgirl* is less overtly political than Amos's previous riffs against patriarchal crimes. It's less fey as well (no harpsichords!), and her vocals don't get whipped so much into that register known as "upper tiramisu." That the messages are less pointed and the presentation less frilly makes for more universal appeal. Unless you can figure out what to make of a song like "Swerp," which is about the "believers that have fins," let's think of this as simply a rock record, which means its meaning is found in noise. You won't find anything nearly as harrowing as the a cappella rape memoir "Me and a Gun" from Little Earthquakes. You will find yourself engaged in old and favorite habits—dancing around; singing along; dropping through all the normal, miraculous rock'n'roll escape hatches. Somebody call *Newsweek*—this is something to believe in. •

- |  |                                    |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Reasonably Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Vile      |

**6 Butthole Surfers**  
*After the Astronaut* (Capitol)

**7 Sonic Youth**  
*A Thousand Leaves* (Geffen)

They're still here. Two bands that emerged from an extraordinary, avant-guitar-driven wave of mutilation in the mid-'80s; bands rooted in punk attitude but who nonetheless reinvented notions of the sheer physically overwhelming immensity of rock that had lain dormant since the demise of Led Zeppelin; bands that understood there are ways of protesting rock's pre-punk phallocentrism, egotism, and virtuosity-for-virtuosity's sake • other than downscaling to skinny ties and jerky, pimply power-pop.

By the early '90s, though, the Sonics and the Buttholes had been superseded by the very bands they'd influenced—Nirvana, Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, Helmet. Their own major-label bids for crossover never quite happened. Yet now that the Kurt-led wave of grunge activity has ebbed, with no apparent sign of any creative resurgence of white American rock emanating from left field, here they still stand—albeit not moving forward, having peaked aesthetically in 1988 with *Daydream Nation* and *Hairwind* to Steven, respectively.

Following their vaguely trip-happy near-hit "Pepper," *After the Astronaut* sees the Surfers augmenting their gross, morphed-out sound with some of the block-rocking structures of British electronics outfits such as the Chemical Brothers, even injecting a little drum'n'bass on "Imbuba." Their druggy, shambolic approach to music-making means they're a bit imprecise, firing off great Scud missiles of noise at random and not always hitting Israel. That said, there's a hardening seriousness beneath the tomfoolery, as on "Jet Fighter," in which a sub-Charlie Daniels, mock gung-ho Gibby Haynes tells the story of a U.S. pilot being shot down and going to heaven.

*Astronaut* improves as it goes on. "Mexico" and "Junkie Jenny in Gaytown" temple-raise Eastern music, looting tables and Indian vocals. On "Last Astronaut," Gibby makes like he's orbiting the planet, but his voice is broken up by a cacophony of aural pollution, as if all the radio waves of the world were spewing out their garbage at once. This is the Buttholes at their best, embracing the chaos of contemporary culture with high flippancy and gaping awe, at once sublime and ridiculous.

The title of Sonic Youth's tenth

album, *A Thousand Leaves*, betrays the reflective autumnal feel of the music, with Thurston Moore keeping the chords ticking over in that familiar, pendulum style he perfected on *Sister* and *Daydream*. Kim Gordon, however, has never sounded less demure and more hot gruff angry than she does here. "Contra la Sextama," "The Ineffable Me," and "Female Mechanic Now On Duty" (in which her predatory cry of "strip you down" seems more emasculatory than lustful) see Gordon struggling furiously for notes she could never reach. The effect is compulsively jarring.

But what really keeps *A Thousand Leaves* vital is the continually inventive fretboard effects of Moore and Lee Ranaldo—the twister frenzy that blackens "Sunday," the Jew's harp wah-wah on "Snara, Girl," the smattering of glistening droplets on "Hiss of Sunshine," and the infinite variety of buzz-saw drums and grinding, sparkling gold-plating addments that cut open and irradiate these songs at every turn.

Neither the Sonics nor the Butt-holes have outdone themselves here. But they have certainly done themselves justice. One could easily be blasé about their continued existence. Yet one suspects that if these were a brace of unknown bands cutting debut albums, the critics would be raving in astonishment. The art-punk margins from which Sonic Youth and Butthole Surfers sprang 15 years ago seem to have been squeezed out, well-meaningly illuminated by the pervasive glare of MTV (which can turn radical gesture into denim sales in seven seconds). Yet it's hard to see who's going to supplant them. Sonic Youth and Butthole Surfers are still here because even when they're reaching within themselves, they're reaching way farther than most. DAVID STUBBS



### 7 Propellerheads *Docksendrumsandrockandroll* (DreamWorks)

Unveiling a smashing command of plugged-in beats, Propellerheads craft an ultra-concise crossover sound whose brute brilliance ensures it needn't apologize for its own populism. This English duo, keyboardist/

saxophonist Alex Gifford and drummer Will White, construct an unhesitatingly rhythmic update of incidentally crammed '60s instrumental pop, working from a fond retroism that ranges from James Bond films to the daft history of suit-and-tie radio voices. This is how affective crossover proceeds: Utterly snappy and effortlessly inclusive, it zooms past crankier, knottier sources and antecedents (your techno, your hip-hop, your jungle), erasing the memory of less slick stuff.

On *Docksendrumsandrockandroll*, Propellerheads' mighty fluff triumphs. What could be cooler than "Velvet Pants," a fleet organ-warmed rhythm track alive with delicious sample repetitions, culled from Alan Lerner's rare 1969 documentary record *The Groups*, of girls fluttering comments like "He's got a nice body / He's wearing velvet pants," and the deathless "And they played records"? If Propellerheads' post-orchestral version of the John Barry Bond theme from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* seems a touch easy, even for these committed leisure cats, consider "You Want It Back," performed with Jungle Brothers. Like this album's De La Soul collaboration "360" (Oh Yeah?), the piece sounds initially like no more than decent hip-hop mood music. But when Jungle Brothers start rapping at the speed of light, cresting on the line "That's why I keep telling you your ass needs to be with me," it takes off. The track goes nuts, racing around with techno speed and pop precision. It prompts the sort of wide-grin reaction Propellerheads seem born to provoke. JAMES HUNTER



### 8 Silk the Shocker *Charge It 2 Da Game (No Limit)*

Hip-hop's dominant folk hero, the playa, is essentially a lovable rogue, duckin' n' divin' on the edge of the law, nothing too nasty, just a few minor misdemeanors in the pursuit of happiness and dead presidents. Silk the Shocker is no playa. The first five minutes and nine seconds of his second album forcefully assert his credentials as soldier. "Murder, murder, kill, kill, it's real / Shell shock, turn your neighborhood block into a battlefield," he

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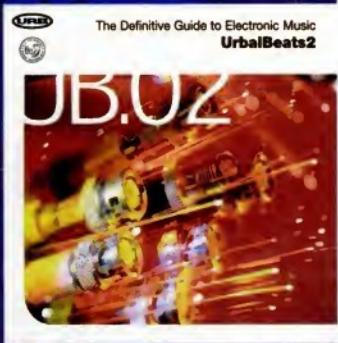
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## reviews

drooled with unconcealed delight on "I'm a Soldier," while 36 rounds of automatic fire rattle around him like surrounder percussion.

This resurrection of semi-defunct gangsta vocab signals a fascinating development in rap culture. In defiance of today's prevailing currents, New Orleans's No Limit Records is leading a return to the taste-free mid-'80s era of rope chains, medallions, and sovereign rings. Their corporate logo could scarcely be more explicit: Every letter is inlaid with diamonds, flanking a gold tank driven by two AK-toting mobsters.

There's a whole *Death Row*-style empire here ready and waiting: C-Murder, Fiend, and Silkk's elder brother/producer Master P (himself already cross-over and soon-to-be retired) all get "Coming Soon" ads in the CD booklet. Rap has seen similar recidivist resurgences in the past (*Geto Boys*, *2 Live Crew*, *Snoop*), but each time it happens, the stakes are raised. Accordingly, *Charge It 2 De Game* is gangsta in extremes. The giddy appearance of dear old Snoop on "Throw Yo Hood Up" is poignant: Slickk has out-Dogged him.

When Ice-T did this sort of thing, he could claim some sort of First Amendment-waving social realist validity. Silkk makes no such claims. Violence, for the No Limits roster, is pure showbiz spectacle. If gangsta is rap's equivalent of Heavy Metal (a built-for-boys, parent-baiting moral vacuum), Silkk the Shockerman is Marilyn Manson.

Silkk is resolutely pre-political, obsessed simply with the methods (but not the ethics) of making dirty cash. For him, it really is all about the Benjamins. The violence is exclusively slyly on-black: Whites don't even exist in Silkk's world. Neither, weirdly, do women (it's difficult to level charges of sexism when females only play bit parts in his stories). Well, until the 15th track, "Ummmm," a comically simulated-sex interlude in which he teases a woman—who's clearly had more than enough—by refusing to come, or stop. She: "You coming?" He (feigning boredom, the ultimate put-down): "Nuh-huh...."

It isn't all celebratory hedonism. There's something oddly mournful about Silkk's description of his weed consumption on "If I Don't Gotta"—he sounds abject, enslaved by marijuana. Likewise, "Who Can I Trust" laments the destructive paranoia that accompanies the soldier lifestyle (perhaps tellingly, Silkk's biceps bears a R.I.P. tattoo in honor of a dead homiey).

Musically, appropriately enough, it's very 1989/N.W.A., all martial, brittle machine-gun beats and tinny samples, the sort of thing 90210's Brandon Walsh might hear pumping from open windows if he found himself cruising the mean streets of Watts, a crease troubling his perfectly coiffed brow. Sometimes it works. Silkk is no great rapper, but his sheer angst (hammy though it is) carries him through, and "Thug 'N' Me" features the best use of that octave-vaulting G-funk synth squeal since its 1994 heyday. Too often, though, it's clunky: "Just Be Straight With Me" carjacks possibly the most phat-ass bass line in funk history (S.O.S. Band's "Just Be Good to Me") and somehow makes it sound skinny, jerky, *white*. Not the future, then, but a great leap sideways. SIMON PRICE



■ Garbage

*Version 2.0* (Almo Sounds)

Back in 1995, the marriage of three Midwestern grunge producers and one Scottish female veteran of Goth-lite never-wooziers Goodbye Mr. Mackenzie didn't appear to be the most direct route to the heart of electronica-tinged hipness. But Garbage couldn't have happened at a better time—they fused raw rawk and production sheen, Yank and Brit, guitars and samplers, just at the point when alt-rock tried to mix authenticity with accessibility only to end up with Hootie.

In 1998, with every rocker who has an ear to the sonic ground resorting to dance-driven gadgetry, the stakes are raised for Garbage: stop moving for a second, and last year's "being ahead of the curve" becomes this year's MOR. But spending the better part of '97 in the studio has paid off massively for the Manson family. *Version 2.0*'s super-fussy electronic textures give Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails a serious run for their knob-twiddling. Sure, Björk is more radical and Stereolab are more highly evolved, but Garbage have the edge over both when it comes to taking aural evan-gardism to the masses. By crafting more fully realized tunes, penning lyrics with a specificity that's at once personal

## Retro Active

### ■ Miles Davis

Panthaea: *The Music of Miles Davis 1969-1974* (Columbia)

### ■ Miles Davis Quintet

1965-1966: *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* (Legacy/Columbia)

Jazz mandarins have long reviled Miles Davis's '70s recordings as crass, flatulent sellouts, the deadbeat dad of every aesthetic horror in the post-Watertower era. But if sensible opinion still chafes at '70s Miles's loud pants and complex jumpsuits, it's finally caught up with his even louder, more complex music. With its polyglot percussion, walling wash-wahs, and seething funk, Davis's electrically amplified oeuvre is a lodestar of today's sonic moment, prophesying the triumph of global rhythm, cosmic texture, and the never-ending groove.

While audiences raised in *Dub Housing* and infected by the Germans' naturally cotton to the music's raging electric boogaloo, it's the platters' postmodern construction process that nails their current relevance. By capturing single, live performances, most jazz recordings replay a narrative that unfolds in linear



Dark magus: Electric-era Miles Davis refuses to say "cheese."

time. Miles and producer Teo Macero turned this approach on its rusty tin ear. Editing countless hours of tape, they spliced and diced the music's siemens-like so many live, pulsing strands of rhythmic DNA. The recording studio became a biology lab, and this seemingly "artificial" process spawned thumbing, organic sound-life that exists in circular time, at once static and in constant perfect flux.

Against this backdrop, *Panthaea* was almost inevitable: bassist and übersoundboy Bill Laswell remixing tracks

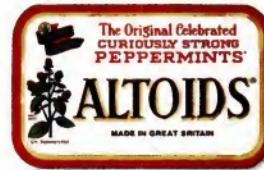
whose "original" mixes are just fleeting evstars of works forever in progress. The ubiquitous Laswell may be living proof that good taste doesn't guarantee good music, but his canny excursions into Miles's electric catalog yield rich and savory batches of bitches' brew, even if he hardly strays from the original recipe. Adventurous palates will gorge on the steaming vindaloo of "Black Satin" and Laswell's subtle mutation of "Rated X." *Panthaea* also dramatizes how Davis's high-voltage science led to beauty as well as bombast, featuring

elegantly abridged versions of the breakthrough *In a Silent Way* sessions and "He Loved Him Madly," Miles's haunting tribute to Duke Ellington.

Careless listeners can miss the subtleties of *Panthaea* operating in the elastic group dynamics and open structures of Miles's last acoustic hurrah—the brilliant mid-'80s quintet featuring saxophonist Wayne Shorter and pianist Herbie Hancock. Marked by daring improvisations and telepathic interplay (check the thrilling, tensile mind-meld between Miles and drummer Tony Williams), the albums collected on *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* units defenders and despilers of jazz tradition in matrimonial bliss. If this comprehensive six-CD box set breaks the bank, the peerless original albums are individually waiting at the register.

Almost three decades after the fact, some still believe that Miles's turn away from the Eden of artistic virtue, begetting the overripe farago of fusion. Just two years ago, the *New York Times* ran a tired screed blaming electric Miles for ruining jazz, burning Old Glory, and poisoning mom's homemade apple pie. Well, the puritans can shake their fists into the next millennium; the rest of us should rejoice as the demon seeds sown by jazz's Prince of Darkness keep bearing new forbidden fruit. ROB MICHAELS

# THESE MINTS HAVE NOT YET BEEN RATED.



## reviews



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and universal, and pumping up the BPMs with an enthusiasm you can feel, these unlikely stars have morphed from a studio project into an actual band, one that's created a nonstop singles aggregation that's going to make the crap glutting Modern Rock radio suck even worse.

With a frontwoman who grew up during new wave's glory days and the rest of the band old enough to remember classic Top 40, Garbage have reached back for songwriting and performance inspiration, even while their sound-processing penchant embraces the futura. "Push It" quotes not only the Salt-N-Pepa jam but also the Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby"; Romeo Void, David Bowie, the Pretenders, and Janice Galloway get their props elsewhere. Real strings, treated woodwinds, and plenty of artificially flavored but utterly yummy ear candy sweeten up a consistently catchier batch of soon-to-be-hits, while also broadening the debut's sultriness with greater extremes of darkness and light.

Marriage hasn't made Shirley Manson any more of a goody-goody: "You look so fine / I wanna break your heart and give you mine" is as tender as she gets. Lesser gals may have stolen some of her thunder, but taking time off to craft alt-rock's very own *Ray of Light* has Manson poised for world domination. First time around she got lucky; now the original Ginger Spice and her cohorts truly deserve it. **BARRY WALTERS**



**6** **Dave Matthews Band**  
*Before These Crowded Streets*  
(RCA)

Speed metal, I get—power, egotism, Satanic growls, 200 BPM testosteronium at thrills. But "friendly" stuff like Dave Matthews always tastes like a veggie burger—goodness, in the grand scheme of things, but not much pleasure. And once you think about it, how good is it, really? Matthews's clenched-anus Sensitive-New-Age-Guy vocalese, in the style made famous by SNAG-rock pioneer Adam Duritz of Counting Crows, shouts passive-aggressive: the whine of someone who desperately hopes you won't figure out how self-aggrandizing he actually is.

Although it pokes in other directions, Matthews's new album mostly reinforces that diagnosis. The love songs convey recognizable adult experiences: "Rapunzel," a spry take on sex and desire; the bead of sweat running down his partner's face in "Wasting Time." These songs capture the best of both worlds, brains and groin duking it out and agreeing to disagree. After that, though, it's lecture time, and the moaning can't disguise the self-importance. "Put your troubles down," Matthews croons in the 40-second opener "Pentals Nago Pampa," backed by the chiming wall of folk his followers have come to know and love. But the singer can't take his own advice. I can see the video for the Middle Easternized "Black & White" already, complete with Deeply Ironic footage from the Gulf War. Packed with celebrities (Alana Monisette contributes back-up warble, Béla Fleck picks his banjo), "Don't Drink the Water" details the white man's rapacious land-grab of North America.

Because of this sort of sanctimony, the bulk of *Before These Crowded Streets* feels morose and overlong, with most songs dawdling along for seven or eight minutes. In concert, the cumulative effect may well be escension, but listening at home, what comes across is insularity, a party you'd denied entry to. Cultists will eat this up, of course; they've already traded innumerable bootlegs of "Halloween," "Pig," and "The Stone." But the rest of us will probably be left craving more meat and less sizzle. **JESSE BERRETT**



**7** **Sean Lennon**  
*Into the Sun* (Grand Royal/Capitol)

On his debut album, Sean Lennon seems like a right regular guy, and it's hard to think of many things weirder than that. His parents have looming reputations, the kind that tend to make children veer off in other directions. He was brought up being stared at for reasons having nothing to do with who he is, and wherever he goes, somebody wants to call him Julian. So it's first of all surprising that on *Into the Sun* Lennon sounds like a guy who enjoys sleeping in with his sweetheart

## Beats and Bytes

Gabba, the fastest and most brutal form of hardcore techno, is mutating like crazy. by Simon Reynolds

Once, there was just "hardcore"—rave music at its most flipped-out and euphoric-aggressive fierce. Then, circa 1992, came the great parting of the ways. English hardcore DJs mixed in hip-hop breaks' "beats to create a hyper-syncopated bedlam that eventually evolved into jungle. The rest of the world stuck with techno's monolithic 4/4 stomp-beat and kept upping the BPMs to ever more punishing extremes. For a while, the Dutch—in the form of the Rotterdam sound called "gabba"—were harder than the rest. Then other outposts—labels like Brooklyn's Industrial Strength, Germany's Monotone, Australia's Bloody Fist, and many more—took it further still. By 1996, though, hardcore was banging its head against a brick wall of schlocky ultraviolence and 250+ 300 BPM velocity. The more astute producers took a step sideways from this brain-dead end. One escape route, followed by Frankfurt's PCP and its sister-labels Dance Ecstasy 2001 and Cold Rush, involved a style that just cries out for the absurd oxymoron "ambient gabba": an atmospheric, slightly slower sound, heavy on cavernous reverb, glacial tex-

tures, and sorrowful melodies. Following awesomely desolate dirges like Renegade Legion's "Torsion," the PCP crew have reached something of an aesthetic pinnacle with Pillidriver's "Apocalypse Never," the tenth Cold Rush release. Pillidriver is one of many pseudonyms (see also the Mover, Mescalium United) used by the mysterious Alec Empire's Acidital Hardcore, which also combines gabba's killer-bee drones, jungle's sped-up breaks and fuzz-guitar-like midfrequency noise. But unlike Digital Hardcore's adrenaline-fueled one-dimensional screw, the Ambush producers leave their assault with a superior sense of dynamics and space. Jackal & Hide's *Escape From South London EP* is a low-fi holocaust of industrial effluent, sardrum-shredding snare, and low-end turbulence. Aphrodite & Scud's *Welcome to the Warren and Snipers at Work EP* sounds like metal-bashers Einstürzende Neubauten getting on the good foot. Best of the lot is the *Give Up EP* by David Hammer (a.k.a. DHR artist Shizuo), who interweaves different kinds of distortion with a sensuous awareness of audio-tactical texture.

Although Ambush's sound verges on outré avant-gardism, DJ Scud—who recently played New York's Soundlab alongside DJ Spooky, Empire, and Manhattan's own harsh-step crusader I-Sound—says his real inspiration is the poppet revs of 1991. Scud wants to bring back "the madness and intensity" of early hardcore, "but not its happy-happy, hands-in-the-air vibe." Hence the dystopian suns and abstract militancy of

ously "splinterbreaks," "hardbreaks," or "hush-step"—is the emergent renegade sound at squat-raves.

Superficially, harsh-step seems to have much in common with Alec Empire's Digital Hardcore, which also combines gabba's killer-bee drones, jungle's sped-up breaks and fuzz-guitar-like midfrequency noise. But unlike Digital Hardcore's adrenaline-fueled one-dimensional screw, the Ambush producers leave their assault with a superior sense of dynamics and space. Jackal & Hide's *Escape From South London EP* is a low-fi holocaust of industrial effluent, sardrum-shredding snare, and low-end turbulence. Aphrodite & Scud's *Welcome to the Warren and Snipers at Work EP* sounds like metal-bashers Einstürzende Neubauten getting on the good foot. Best of the lot is the *Give Up EP* by David Hammer (a.k.a. DHR artist Shizuo), who interweaves different kinds of distortion with a sensuous awareness of audio-tactical texture.

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Ambush's four releases to date. Side-stepping DHR's full-frontal approach (staggering haarsqueaks), harsh-step's anarcho-politics are more subtle—articulated in technoe-theory zones like *Break/Flow*, *Datacide*, and Scud's own *Fallout*, hinted at in the paramilitary imagery of track titles and band names, and most of all, incarnated in the music itself. At once savage and sophisticated, harsh-step is the sound of insubordination—not just against sonic stagnation but against cultural lockdown too: the urban politics of gentrification and ghettoization, the insidious normalization of surveillance. If gabba was techno-as-heavy-metal, harsh-step is new millennium punk-funk. (Ambush, Cold Rush, and other hardcore labels available via Syntax Distribution, 222 West 37th Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10018.) ♦

Cold rush virus: the logo of gloomcore gabba label Dance Ecstasy 2001.



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## reviews

and watching too much TV. Some-  
one, I'd guess from the musical  
evidence here, who partakes in the  
same herbal sacraments that once  
landed White Panther leader John  
Sinclair in jail. A person "trying to  
keep it real," as he says in one song.  
In other words, a confused, unre-  
markable guy—and how remarkable  
is that?

Lennon's Casio beats hiss like a  
griddle, his voice is pleasantly thin,  
that synth he bought at the Death  
Row lawn sale had better go into  
Money Mark's repair shop; there's  
a gentle looseness to the album that  
may be its single strategy—disguise  
well-put-together songs as arty  
casuals. A given song might break  
into a big-time power-pop chorus as  
easily as it might curl up for a nap.  
The words are split between pushing  
on with life and watching the  
world swim by. Somehow, Lennon  
makes them both seem the same—  
"Queer" is a pop tune about stand-  
ing in line, about waiting as the very  
meaning of life.

*Into The Sun* isn't static—"Two  
Fine Lovers" is goosebump funk  
so sweet it could give Boz Scaggs  
an ice cream headache, and the  
pothead crime-jazz instrumental  
"Photogenesis" features an  
extended trumpet solo that actually  
cooks. But there's a pleasing flux to  
this record, a winsome modesty.  
That might be because these days  
strummers and songwriters such as  
Elliott Smith and Lennon implicitly  
speak from the margins—the center  
of power is where the beats are.  
But Lennon's low-key songs—they  
sound like demos you couldn't build  
on without destroying—also suggest  
how his more would once launch  
a simple conceptual-art gesture  
and let it multiply a million times in  
your mind.

There's not a damn thing hip-hop  
evident, but ultimately *Into The Sun*  
depicts something the rappers in  
Wu-Tang Clan are always saying:  
Whatever-whatever. When one  
ambiguity just won't do, Wu lay out  
a way of life, articulate an eagerness  
to take things as they come and  
declare any place they go as home.  
Lennon leaps headfirst into the great  
whatever-whatever. "And when the  
day is done, you know I'll follow you  
into the sun," he moans in the title  
song, a lovely bossa nova duet with  
Cibo Matto's Yuka Honda. Just when  
you're carried away by this sweet  
nothingness, the chorus arrives so  
gently it registers as music, not  
words: "Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah."  
Communication without content,

love without irony, it's as forceful  
in its little way as "nevermind"  
once was. **RJ SMITH**

### 7 Girls Against Boys *Freak'on'ice* (Geffen)

Slaves to the rhythm, Girls Against  
Boys dangle a mirror ball over the  
mosh pit, packing their convulsive  
cock rock with pulsing electronic  
contortions. The band's debut major-  
label release represents a dramatic  
expansion of their sonic palette.

Straying significantly from the art-  
punk-funk blueprint drafted on their  
first four albums, *Freak'on'ice* is  
unashamedly high-wattage—simulta-  
neously more metal, more disco,  
more pop. And its spruced-up pro-  
duction raises the inevitable prickly  
question: Is this art or commerce?  
Given the band's D.C. hardcore  
purist roots (even after signing with  
Geffen, they stuck with indie label  
Touch and Go for 1996's staggering  
*House of GVB*), it's an especially del-  
icate dilemma. For when you're offi-  
cially rock 'n' roll's sexiest baddies,  
the last thing you want to provoke is  
accusations of faking it.

As it happens, the slickly melodic  
*Freak'on'ice* can be charged with  
nothing more damning than slight  
overlubrication. The new material  
lacks the raw surliness of yore, but  
the clean lines of Nick Launay's pro-  
duction suit the subliminal hook;  
now they're equally adept at  
hopped-up anthems, and chief  
mutterer Scott McCloud carries a  
tune more gracefully than his patent  
forebear Mark E. Smith of the Fall.

*Freak'on'ice*'s digitized rock  
stomps all over the lightly dusted  
attempts of so many electronica-  
dabbling guitar bands because Girls  
Against Boys have always had an  
innate, near-fetishistic interest in  
rhythm and texture. The album's true  
star and sonic ringmaster is probably  
Eli Janney—backing vocalist, key-  
board player, and (in tandem with  
Johnny Temple) bassist. Found  
sounds and synth squiggles run riot;  
guitars and drums are sampled,  
spiced, and looped, all in accord-  
ance with the preferred GVB  
method of taking a fiercely elemental  
sound and screwing with it. The  
resulting hard rock is monolithic yet  
strangely mutable, spinning off unexpected  
lyrics like "Pleasurid,"  
a strobe-lit glitter-Goth freak-out.

Not quite as thrillingly visceral  
as *House of GVB*, *Freak'on'ice*  
indulges the band's previously under-  
developed playful side. A decidedly

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nontreathtaking romp, the album punctuates Gvb's long-standing sex-machine image, rendering it slightly cartoonish. McCloud's come-ons aren't so much risqué as self-consciously ridiculous ("Kiss my sound system," he implores on "Speedway"). The odd narrative lyric aside, Gvb's "meaning" resides in the realm of pure sound (McCloud's rasp included). At once stark and intricate, obvious and obscure, sensitive and brutal, Girls Against Boys are a bundle of contradictions; with an unmistakable swagger, they muscle their way past the paradoxes, resolving them without a second thought. DENNIS LIM



### 8 Sarge

*The Glass Intact* (Mud/Parasol)

Sarge seem to have zoomed out of nowhere. You can hear the debt this young Champaign, Illinois, foursome owe to riot grrrl in the explosive emotional intensity of their songs (mostly sung from a woman's point of view, although two of the band's members are men). Yet Sarge bring so much discipline, so much spit-and-polish, to their particular brand of punk-pop they've clearly stretched beyond the willfully amateurish boundaries of riot grrrl.

Sarge's radiant, jigsaw-jagged debut, 1996's *Charcoal*, showed us mirror images of aggression and re-ignition, cloudy uncertainty and mad-as-hell defiance. *The Glass Intact* takes the same contradictions and pulls them into sharper focus. If there was ever a band that captured the essence, and the pure poetry, of day for night—the filmmaking technique of simulating nighttime by shooting with filters during broad daylight—it's Sarge. Minor chords sound like nothing so much as sunshine, desolate and exhilarating at the same time.

The songs on *The Glass Intact* are like miniature novels; their narratives collapse into compact, intense spirals. The more you listen to them, the more they expand, like a swirl of milk in a cup of coffee, revealing unmapable love triangles, the joy and terror of being attracted to a member of the same sex, the emotional violence you reserve for the people you love most. "Will I pay for the smack that

left me safe?" songwriter/guitarist/lead singer Elizabeth Elmore asks, in a voice fragile as spun sugar and tough as polyester, leaving us to wonder whether she's thinking of a drug, a slap, or a kiss. She drops more clues in the next line, but still refuses to completely give herself away. Her voice betrays both militant self-preservation and regret—sharp day-and-night sides of the same coin—when she sings, with chilling tenderness, "So let's stay in bed all day and pray that things will die okay."

Nervy, hopelessly seductive, and hell-bent for trouble and heartache, *The Glass Intact* peers at the world through a very dark lens—but the sun, with both its menace and its warmth, is never far from view. (Mud, 905 S. Lynn St., Urbana, IL 61801) STEPHANIE ZACHAREK



### 2 The Jesus Lizard

*Blue* (Capitol)

After years toe-tapping in San Francisco's burmout bistros, two things have become clear. One is that speed is bad for you. The other is that if a sub-transcendentally lousy piece of dirt-rock hacks forth from the sound system, someone with ill-advised facial hair will inform you it's the Jesus Lizard and how they're really great.

In fact, they are not great. The best I can say for them is that they descend from Scratch Acid, which was a swell name. The Jesus Lizard share with its ancestor-band an Austin heritage, two Daves, and a basic conceit from which they will not relent: The business of music is annoyance.

On *Blue*, they supplement their repertoire of grinding catchlessness with some jazz, flanger, tonal stuff: "Until It Stopped to Die" boasts an enjoyable bass line (most recently, I enjoyed it on Folk Implosion's "Natural One"). There is also repeated confusion between Bad Brains and a bad mood ("Cold Water," "Soft Damage"), resulting in a grunge-funk that is probably danceable if you've ingested the aforementioned stimulants. At least this makes the bistro scene seem coherent. The best song—no surprise, given singer David Yow's "Custard Pie" cover on

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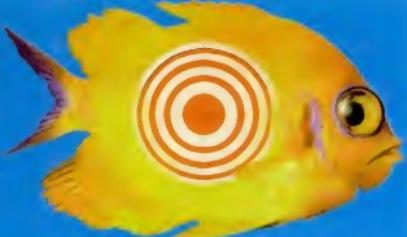
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## reviews

a Led Zeppelin tribute album—is “Needles for Teeth,” a solid Page riff with poor singing.

Criminy, even Steve Albini (for whom one Dave once played bass in Repeman) is tired of this noise-shit. Nonetheless, T.J. hold firm to the company line that real rock should sound unpleasant enough to snub the folks and bug the neighbors. In this respect, the Jesus Lizard stand toe-to-toe with the Spice Girls. Both appeal to an adolescent idea of what music is about, without appealing to actual adolescents, who know better. JANE DARK

### QUICK CUTS

#### 3 Lenny Kravitz 5 (Virgin)

Here we are on the brink of the millennium, but nobody's told Lenny Kravitz, who's still cranking out pedestrian Prince-style glam-funk like it's 1978. But as rate as Kravitz's music has become (set aside that bad, bodily derivative of Sly Stone; at worst, bodily derivative of Lenny Kravitz), it's still better than his lyrics, which typically feature Very Deep Thoughts like, “I wish that I could fly / into the sky / So very high / Just like a dragonfly.” Yo, Lenny—hate to break this to you, baby, but dragonflies mainly just hover a few feet above stagnant ponds. Elsewhere, in a couplet that may be more revealing than was intended, Kravitz sings, “Do you feel your life's a big mistake? / Don't you hate the way it's all so fake?” Lenny's therapist is probably very proud of him for that little breakthrough. PAUL LUKAS

#### 3 Plaid Not for Threes (Nothing)

Scanning industrial, reggae, house, and minimalist textures redolent of Steve Reich, British electronic duo Ed Handley and Andy Turner coat their Plaid songs in a glaze of ultra-vivid textures—snorting mammals, metallic insects, rain-forest gurgles, and whizzing lunar dashes. As with their previous output as two-thirds of the Black Dog—one of the most acclaimed exponents of early '90s home-listening techno—Plaid's odd-metered beats and polyrhythmic percussion often recall '70s jazz fusion. Quoting Chick Corea's cornball fusion epic *Romatic Warrior* on “Forever” might be going too far, but mostly *Not for Threes* keeps the kitch and loses the stigma. On

## Singles by Charles Aaron

Question of the month: As we wade into biological Armageddon, should rock'n'roll be more like a drive-by shooting or a drive-thru window? Send answers and promotional threat lozenges to Singles, c/o Charles Aaron, Spin, 6 W. 18th St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10011.

### Arsonists

“Blaze”/“Geeombo’s Theme”/  
“Flashback” (Fondle ‘Em)  
Sure, indie-underground hip-hop is way too obsessed with “skills,” “phony rappers,” and “rippin’ mics,” but when a culture is defaced and defamed, sometimes kids gotta re-create the spirit of the past to live in the present. Arsonists get the party restarted right with six ferocious voices, “rippin’, no phony skills. Natch.

### DMX

“Get at Me Dog” (Def Jam)  
in the same way that Method Man’s “Method Man” was the best Busta Rhymes single of 1993, “Get at Me Dog” is the best Method Man single of 1996, at least so far. Poignant sample from *Turner & Hooch*—just kidding, dog! Wooff!

### Ben Folds Five “Brick” (Sony 550)

Not a single per se, but a “Modern Rock Tailor” that shows how this piano ballad wears its brooding, choked heart on its sleeve with more melodic depth and poetry than 35 Grammy-nominated Babysitter “compositions.” Folds sings his story of a drunk guy and a lonely girl and an unwanted baby makes three with fatigued restraint, never forcing his voice to strain for cheap sympathy. Head in rainy gridlock on I-85 outside Greenville, South Carolina, while driving home for Christmas, it’s a killer.

### Funkdoobiest

“Papi Chulo” (Buzztone/RCA)  
Featuring Death Row honcho Daz and femme rapper Cobie Red, these forgotten porno-funksters drop one of the year’s nastiest hip-hop joints. Masterfully produced by DJ Rectangle, who samples the Squirrel Nut Zippers “Hell” and makes it swing like one of Willie Bobo’s fried neckbones.

### Funky Green Dogs “Until the Day” (Twisted America/MCA)

Less desolate and obsessed than their '96 death-disco mantra “Frida Up,” this anthem from Miami’s Ralph Falcon and Oscar Gaeta (s.k.a. the MURK Royal, again featuring vocalist Pamela Williams, exults and struts like Aretha sneaked into the kitchen. Still waiting for the speed garage remixes.

Hive

"Ultrasonic Sound"/"Moves Within Time" (ffrr/London)  
On the A side, this 22-year-old D.C. native/L.A. resident samples Bad Brains' "Reignition" over a stoic breakbeat, shifts into noisish drum'n'bass, scratches up a ghostly free-for-all, then exits with a T. La Rock quote. Boom bap! The B side confirms that he's read the DJ Shadow instruction manual, which is not a dit at all. The kid is dope.

Wyclef Jean

"*Gone Till November*" (Columbia) The "Pop Version," with its weepy string section, is a cavalier nursery rhyme—love lost to boyish games—but the thumping "Makin' Runs Remix" gets explicit: Wyclef is a roguish drug dealer goin' south, tempting fate, and imperiling his family, while R. Kelly pleads his weak, romanticized case on the chorus. Incendiary guest rapper Canibus steals like an articulate Garry Oldman.

**Jimmy Ray**

**"Are You Jimmy Ray?" (Epic)**  
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BRANK MIGLIOTTI/OUTLINE

**Basement japes:** Ben Folds Five, from left, Darren Jessee, Robert Sledge, and Ben Folds. But where are the other two...?

you Martha Raye? / Are you Bob and Ray? / Are you Satyajit Ray? / Are you Michael Ray Richardson? / Who wants to know? / Who wants to know?"

## **Spacetime Continuum**

**Real Time EP**  
(Astralwerks/Caroline)  
Scotland's Bay Area DJ-in-residence Jonah Sharn (a.k.a. Spaceetime Continuum) is known for his lush, jittery, acid fusion single "Kairo," but the A side of this EP is so Detroit soulful ("Microjam"), it's leisurely funky, and downright neighborly ("Neoteric") that you'll wanna promenade your partner 'round the cyber cafe; Japanese rapper MC Giras serves verbal herbs d'oeuvres.

## **Shania Twain**

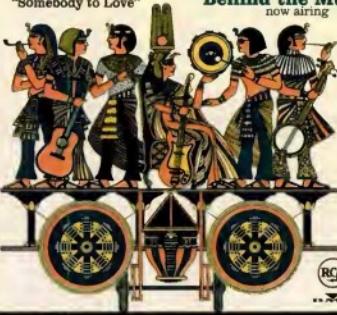
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"Rakimor," singer Maré's luxurious lament is consolved by caressing strings and ethnic rhythms; the Bach-style chamber lilt of "Kortisin" mutates into slippery De La Soul funk. Handley & Turner recently toured as Björk's road band; returning the favor, the equally jazz-infatuated Icelandic princess guests on the big beat of "Lilith." Like the best moments on Björk's *Homogenic*, Pleid's touchy-feely techno envelops you in a singular, surreal world that is both deliciously nightmarish and lovingly serene. KEN MICHAEL

#### ■ Req

#### *Frequency Jams* (Skin)

Leading Big Beat label Skint mostly releases admirably dumb hip-hop and glemmed-up house aimed directly at England's bustling indie-dance scene. Anonymous and hermetic, graffiti artstReq is the wallflower of the label's party-down roster. Strung out on dread, often arrhythmic, and always stubbornly undanceable, *Frequency Jams* is the frigid flipside to Skint's post-trip-hop irreverence. "World" and "Crack" fizz on icy welters of trebly noise, the beats only finding their flow after brutal stop-start crossfades. "Mbire Classic"

and "Vocoder Break Rock" recall the brittle flux of electric pioneers Men Parrish. On "Navigator 1" and "2," the beat absconds entirely, leaving just a warped-out rumba of harsh bass worship of hard-core dancehall reggae, while "I" and "Bizarnes" splay grisly jazz-funk over spectral drones more akin to avant-rock than hip-hop. A bleak alternative to Big Beat's bumptious cheer, *Frequency Jams* is a timely reminder that hip-hop's techniques still lend themselves to extreme noise terror. Chill out and die. NEIL KULKARNI

#### ■ Solex

#### *Solex vs. the Hitmeister*

(Matador)

The brains, brawn, and beauty behind the experimental pop sound of Solex is Elisabeth Esselinck, lista of the Dutch guitar-rock band Sonetic Vet. A bumptious mix of found sound, samples (which all originate from the "can't sell" bin at the used vinyl store where Esselinck works), keyboards, and sundry contributions by guest musicians, the Solex sound is a loopy jumble that comes on like trip-hop at the circus. Lurking in the muddled mix, Esse-link plies the blithe, wide-eyed vo-

luptuous, lesciviously murmuring, "The straps kept slipping off my shoulders" or the Lush-like "Solex in e Slipshod Style," and chirping "In the morning we soaped each other down" on "Waking Up With Solex." Unlike Unrest, who also revel in an earthy sultriness, Solex frustrate their own seduction scenes — the cold inorganicity of synthesized beats creates distance, the tyrannical percussiveness wreaking havoc upon Esselinck's phrasing of her already elliptical lyrics. Vexing as it is, Solex's mystery of the art of playing hard-to-get makes for an irresistible, if radically unsatisfying, encounter. SARA MANAUGH



#### ■ Bad Religion

#### *No Substance* (Atlantic)

Lucky for Bad Religion, punk rock America is an endlessly renewable fountain of restless youth. The band's

career has lasted long enough for original guitarist Brett Gurewitz to found Epitaph Records as a DIY outlet for Bad Religion's records, watch that business grow into a multimillion-dollar enterprise (thanks largely to the Offspring), and finally leave Bad Religion to devote his time to running Epitaph and doing drugs.

Meanwhile, Bad Religion soldier on.

Singer and Ph.D. candidate Greg Graffin still uses his trademark basso profundo to deliver world-historical Schoolhouse Rock screeds, which his bandmates skillfully package as pop-punk confections. While you can't fault Graffin's reach (except when he writes songs with titles like "The Voracious Merch of Godliness") or the band's ideals (there's actually a Bad Religion scholarship fund), their sound is as one-dimensional as the American technocracy they lambaste. *No Substance* does unveil some new tricks, but chief among these is one song that sounds like Foreigner ("The Biggest Killer in American History") and another that mimics the Guess Who's "Raisin' Your Voice"). When the revolution comes, it will apparently be all substance and no style. GREG MILNER

# Lenny Kravitz 5

## featuring "If You Can't Say No"

Produced, written, arranged and performed by Lenny Kravitz

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WORDS + GUITARS

# Metal Machine Music

Prodigy-style rocktronica x (post-Reznor industrial + Goth-metal thrash)= the ultimate teenage kick. by Chuck Eddy

Over murderous metal guitars and a Billy Squier-big-beat drum machine, Run-D.M.C. yelled out an automation-ultimatum—"our DJ's better than all these bands"—on their 1984 crossover hit "Rock Box." Before you knew it, armpit art punks such as Big Black and the Three Johns took the cue and employed, if not quite two turntables and a microphone, at least hip-hop beat boxes. Eventually, a flock of "industrial dance" birdbeards did it worse; by the mid-'90s, a few (Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, Marilyn Manson) got famous. Rare children followed suit, dosing their hellincogenic pulse with sawed-off six-string samples—sometimes on their own (Prodigy, Atari Teenage Riot), sometimes helped out by trash bands (1997's *Spawn* soundtrack). Now, with the walls demolished between all these aggressive teen genres, a horde of mercenary garage boys are swarming outta Podunk with synths and sequencers in tow, often rocking more passionately and less stiffly than the blueprints that inspired them.

The healthiest-sounding of said yokel breed are Western Illinois University alumni and MTV class-of-'96 buzz-bingers *Stabbing Westward*, whose new *Darkest Days* (Columbia) has a chunky tunefulness squeezing down tight Zeppelin twists into fest curly-fried hooks, à la Def Leppard's *Pyromania*. Technopop knob-twiddling expands the meaty roll into polyrhythms, and Chris Hall's neurotically howled chorus catchphrases come off like unaffected conversation: "Everything I touch, I break," "I cannot save you/I can't even save myself." *The Hunger* offer a more ponderously full-of-themselves take on the same electro-grunge sensibility. Too often plodding, *Cinematic Superthug* (Universal) does feature a few elephant-stomping bursts of life, such as "Phoenix" is Nirvana-melodied Cobain eulogy that starts out like "I Wanna Be Your Dog" gone Eurodigital and "SunkSoLow" ("Immigrant Song" gone Eurodigital).

The Hunger's Texan neighbors

*Course of Empire* are more eccentric. *Telepathic Last Words* (TVT)—produced by NIN/Greedy

Kills overseer John Fryer—thrills when the band abandons their Metallica-bludgeon mode for undulating psychedelic erasures ("Ride the Static," "59 Minutes") or '70s-Bowie-brand glam ("Captain Control," a jetboy-star-dusted cover of the crooner standard "Blue Moon"). Even Course of Empire's more organic beats feel mechanical in a way that somehow lends credence to Veigh Stevenson's nervously vibrated Internet Age obsessions.

The pride of rural Pennsylvania, *God Lives Underwater* looked like they were headed in a similar cyber-rock direction on their earlier records. But despite occasional snatches of tar-pit thud and H-bomb blurt, *Life in the So-Called Space Age* (A&M) tones down GLU's guitar-in favor of trebly New Age wind chime and TV-left-on effects. The single "From Your Mouth" funks up some Depeche Mode linkiness, but

mora typical is the literally subaesthetic-sounding "Medicated to the One I Love"—more passive than aggressive, enervated enough to charm *OK Computer* fans (i.e., everybody but me).

*Junkie XL's* jolly *Fat of the Land* facsimile *Saturday Teen-age Kick* (Reedrunner) throws a wilder party, and constitutes the most realized rip-off yet of the '90s' most uncompromised dance-metal hybrid. As with Prodigy, Junkie's big phat zig-zag bleepbeats fully capture disco's free-spirit swing, and these Amsterdam-steet don't skimp on muscle, either—they sample Hüsker Dü riffs, and their rapper yell outs silly slangs like e more acrobatic Rege Against the Machine. Unlike Ministry types who always get bogged down in clumsy ugliness, Junkie XL loop their racket into graceful spans of minimalist space. And their title cut deserves to be an adolescent anthem.

By comparison, *Pitchshifter's* www.pitchshifter.com (DG) sounds like Prodigy with all the fun taken out. Merring drum'n'bass to grindcore (perhaps the two most nerve-wracking "difficult" music styles) under puritanical tantrums about how evil "civilized society" is, these inept Nottingham noisekicks care more about being "extreme" than being musical. Just as chaotic but way smarter is Phobos (Hypnotic) by Volvod, the most consistently compelling avant-metal outfit of the past decade. Quebecers who eons ago mastered the art of making guitars feel like machines, Volvod are now adding computerized tones (provided by Men Without Hats safety-dancer Ivan Doroschuk!) to match their futuristic CD-cover graphics. The band's dense compositional sense helps what at first sounds like monster vomit work instead as aural Prozac—I actually play the CD when I'm stressed out!

High jinks: teenage tomfoolery from Dutch techno-metal tearaways *Junkie XL*; Tom Hollenkamp (above), Rude Boy (below).

Spiraling flying-saucer bleeps, unmistakably odd ax carvings, and even an accordion fly through a black hole of urban-jungle percussion until the disc finally ends with a cover of King Crimson's "21st Century Schizoid Man," which could be Voivod's theme song.

Death-metal delves even further into the paradoxical ambient-sound realm on *Sin/Pecado* (Century Media) by Portuguese geasers Moonspell—what with its Latin chants, continental clanblackets, minor-key headphones exercises,

and nocturnally emisionned doom-moods, this stained-glass landscape is almost sensual enough to work as a backdrop for sex with Merry Megadene. Sculpted by Waldemar Sorychta—the Phil Specter of Enigma-influenced Eurometal—only *Sin/Pecado's* intermittently pulverizing depth-charge thrash chords and stentorian vocal groans remind you it's actually a "heavy metal" album. Somehow funeral-rock artists from romance-languish locales (Héroes Del Silencio from Spain, La Cestaneda from Mexico, Noir Desir from France) pull off this sort of ominoso-mennered melodrama more soulfully than U.S. or U.K. guys. I wish Moonspell didn't feel the need to shock squeamish pedophiliophobes like yours truly by naming a track "Let the Children Cum to Me," but maybe that's just their tribute to Michael Jackson's Goth side.

*Tattoo + Pain's* comparable immersion in dungeon decadence on *Vengeance Is Mine* (Antler Subway) is a hoot—the most unintentionally hilarious metal long-player in years. "Afraid to drown in the toilet bowl of life," these bare-chested brutes mix neon-lit Sabbath chords into bondage-and-discipline bugglegum. From the three male members' chessball Eurotutur accents and nihilist English-as-second-language hooligan raps about "getting pissed, getting laid, and getting stoned" to dominatrix Linzi Wilner's trip-hop-meets-*Flashdance* Wicca-pop, there's enough unbridled cluelessness here to justify Trent Reznor's entire flawed existence. ♦



"You lookin' at me?": cyber-punks *Course of Empire*.

## reviews

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**Ani  
DiFranco**  
**Little Plastic  
Castle**  
(Language/  
Crammed)

What you're missing: "Zygotes of songs" (her own terms) with a guitar prowess she rarely gets credit for.  
Conclusion: Girlfriend is on a mission to carve out a safe space for misfit sexual anarchists who admit love hurts.



**Dimitri  
From Paris**  
**Sacrebleu**  
(Atlantic)

What you're missing: A smoothly coherent lesson in A.M.D. (After Martin Denny) pop history and a semi-ironic, vive-la-France rejoicing in Gallic eccentricity.  
Conclusion: Once, everyone wanted to be a Rock Star; now, everybody wants to be a Lone Bedroom Eccentric.



**The Donnas**  
**American  
Teenage  
Rock 'n' Roll  
Machine**  
(Lookout!)

What you're missing: The Donnas squeeze ten pop-cally pom-pom stompers into 24 shiny minutes of party-metal hair spray.  
Conclusion: These desperate teenage lovesicks insist that girls needn't give it up to live it up.



**Killah  
Priest**  
**Heavy  
Mental**  
(Geffen)

What you're missing: "Between the eye sockets is where I build my rockets / I broke the U.S. her code / Only to blow a hole." Then someone begs him to turn off the tape. Jiggy!  
Conclusion: Priest builds beats that are as much digital noise as rhythm.



**Pearl Jam**  
**Yield**  
(Epic)

What you're missing: Port touchstone, port parish, Pearl Jam have tried arty gestures; they've ostentatiously declined to rock; now they've come back with an album full of graciously ambivalent anthems.  
Conclusion: The revelation of Yield is Vedder's effort to communicate again.



**Pulp**  
**This Is  
Hardcore**  
(Island)

What you're missing: Jarvis Cocker, living in the same world as the rest of us, and admitting as much without blowing his chic.  
Conclusion: Who else amuses back at you in quite the same way?



**2Pac**  
**R U Still  
Down?  
(Remember  
Me)**  
(Ameri/Unive)

What you're missing: This second collection of pre-prison material (1991-94) is prophecy from a voice that buried itself in grief well before the body's demise.  
Conclusion: As always, there's ample self-destructive bullshit, but as a whole, the album's eerie and undeniable.



**Robert  
Wyatt**  
**Sheep**  
(Thirty Earl)

What you're missing: Graceful mistakes, grown-up melodies, and rhythms that care more about the earth turning than your ass shaking.  
Conclusion: Electronauts who don't know what people are capable of in real time will be shamed by the beauty therein.

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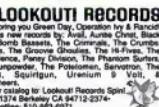
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# GENIUS LESSONS BY SEAN LANDERS

#25 "PEP TALK" I DON'T KNOW OR CARE MUCH ABOUT MUSIC. ALL I ASK IS TO BE ABLE TO TURN ON MY RADIO WHEN I PAINT MY PAINTINGS AND HEAR SOMETHING HALFWAY DECENT, BUT NOW IN THE LATE NINETIES THAT SIMPLE ACT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. WITH SHIT BANDS LIKE BEN FOLDS FIVE, SUGAR RAY, MATCH BOZZO, AND THIRD EYEBUND CLOGGING PLAY LISTS HOW THE AM I SUPPOSED TO MAKE GOOD ART? I'M NOT ASKING FOR MUCH, JUST A SEMI-ORIGINAL SOUND, GOOD LYRICS AND A FEW TEAR JERKING BALLADS PER ALBUM. OKAY SO I LIKE THE CHICK SONGS ON AN ALBUM WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT? I DO MY BEST WORK WHEN THE BALLADS ARE ON. LOOK, I NEED MUSIC TO MOTIVATE ME AND BANDS LIKE BEN FOLDS FIVE MOTIVATE ME TO TURN OFF MY RADIO, TO BREAK MY RADIO, TO PUKE ON MY RADIO BUT NOT TO LISTEN TO MY RADIO, AND DEFINITELY NOT TO PAINT. HEY ROCK WANNABES, YOU HAVE A VOID TO FILL. THERE IS REAL MONEY TO BE MADE HERE, LABELS ARE PROMOTING ASS WIPES WHEN THEY COULD BE PROMOTING YOU. THAT'S RIGHT, YOU COULD BE THE NEXT GIANT OF ROCK AND YOU WILL BE IF YOU SIMPLY TAKE MY ADVICE. #1, LIMIT YOUR MASTURBATION, BUILD UP A GOOD LOAD OF CHEESE, IT HELPS CREATIVITY. #2, DON'T SMOKE AS MUCH DOPE AS YOU NORMALLY DO, IT MAKES YOU PARANOID WHICH CAN BE USEFUL IN AN DOMAGODOMA SORT OF WAY, BUT ULTIMATELY MAKES YOU LAZY AND SULLY IN A GREATFUL DEAD SORT OF WAY. [WHO'S GRATEFUL THAT OLD GOAT IS DEAD, I AM THAT'S WHO] USE CRANK IF YOU HAVE TO DO DRUGS, AT LEAST YOU'LL GET THINGS DONE. #3, FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS WAY BETTER LOOKING THAN YOU, THEN PROCEED TO GET DUMPED ON YOUR ASS AND BROKEN HEARTED. YOU WANT TO BE IN SUCH MENTAL ANGUISH FROM THIS, THAT IF YOU DON'T WRITE A SONG, YOU WILL BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT. WHAT DO YOU WRITE ABOUT? THE FACT THAT YOU GOT DUMPED YOU DUMB ASS, AND DON'T SKIMP ON THE MELODRAMA, THAT'S THE STUFF THAT PUTS YOU ON THE CHARTS, BUT DON'T BE PATHETIC EITHER OR YOU'LL BE BEN FOLDS SIX. #4, YOU ARE GOING TO SELL MORE RECORDS IF YOU MAKE YOUR AUDIENCE FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU OR AT LEAST WANT TO FUCK YOU. QUIT WITH THE CAPTAIN CRUNCH THREE TIMES A DAY GENIUS. #5, LISTEN TO DAVID BOWIE ALBUMS FROM THE TIME WHEN HE WAS PRESSING LIKE A FREAK IN THE 70'S. IT SEEMS TO BE WHAT'S INSPIRING ENGLISH BANDS NOW, AND AS WE KNOW, KURT WAS WAY INTO IT. #6, THE ONLY THING THAT WILL MAKE YOU A ROCK GOD IS IF YOU ARE HONEST, SO SING IN YOUR OWN VOICE, DON'T FALL INTO THE "I WANNA BE KURT TRAP" LIKE BUSH, SILVER CHAIR ETC. ETC. AD NAUSEAM. #7, CUT THIS SENSITIVE MALE CRAP, WOMEN DON'T WANT TO SEE MEN WHINING AND CRYING ON STAGE, THEY WANT TO SEE A MAN WHO'S NOT AFRAID TO TEASE HIS HAIR, PUT ON LIPSTICK AND TIGHTS AND GO FRANCING AROUND THE STAGE SCREAMING ABOUT PUSSY. #8, THERE IS NOTHING WORSE THAN THIS SELF CONSCIOUS ROCK STAR LOOK THAT'S BEEN IN VOGUE SINCE THE FALL OF HEAVY METAL. NO MORE THRIFT STORES! #9, IF YOU WEREN'T BORN WITH AN ALCOHOLIC DAD WHO BEAT AND RAPED YOU, THEN YOU ARE OPERATING AT A DIS-ADVANTAGE, BUT YOU CAN MAKE UP FOR THIS LACK IN PERSONAL TRAGEDY IF YOU BECOME A DRUG ADDICT OR LIKE GETTING CEL ROOM ON YOUR ROOM ON YO-SABLE LATER ON THE RADIO SO QUIT READ-ICE YOU QUIT SQU- EEZING LITTLE

ADVANTAGE AT AN AIRPORT WITH A GUN. #10, GET A FEW FRIENDS TOGETHER, RENT A MOTEL LOCAL STRIP AND PROCEED TO TRASH IT. THIS IS A SKILL THAT WILL PROVE INDISPENSABLE IN LIFE. LISTEN, DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET THERE BECAUSE I CAN'T STAND THIS CRAP ANYMORE. I NEED YOU TO SUCCEED SO I CAN SUCCEED, I'M WRITING TO YOU IN FERNEST FREEING THIS MAGAZINE, DUST OFF THAT BLOWN OUT AMP IN YOUR CORNER, UNTANGLE THE SLIM SHITS..... NOW!!! YOUR FRIEND SEAN



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